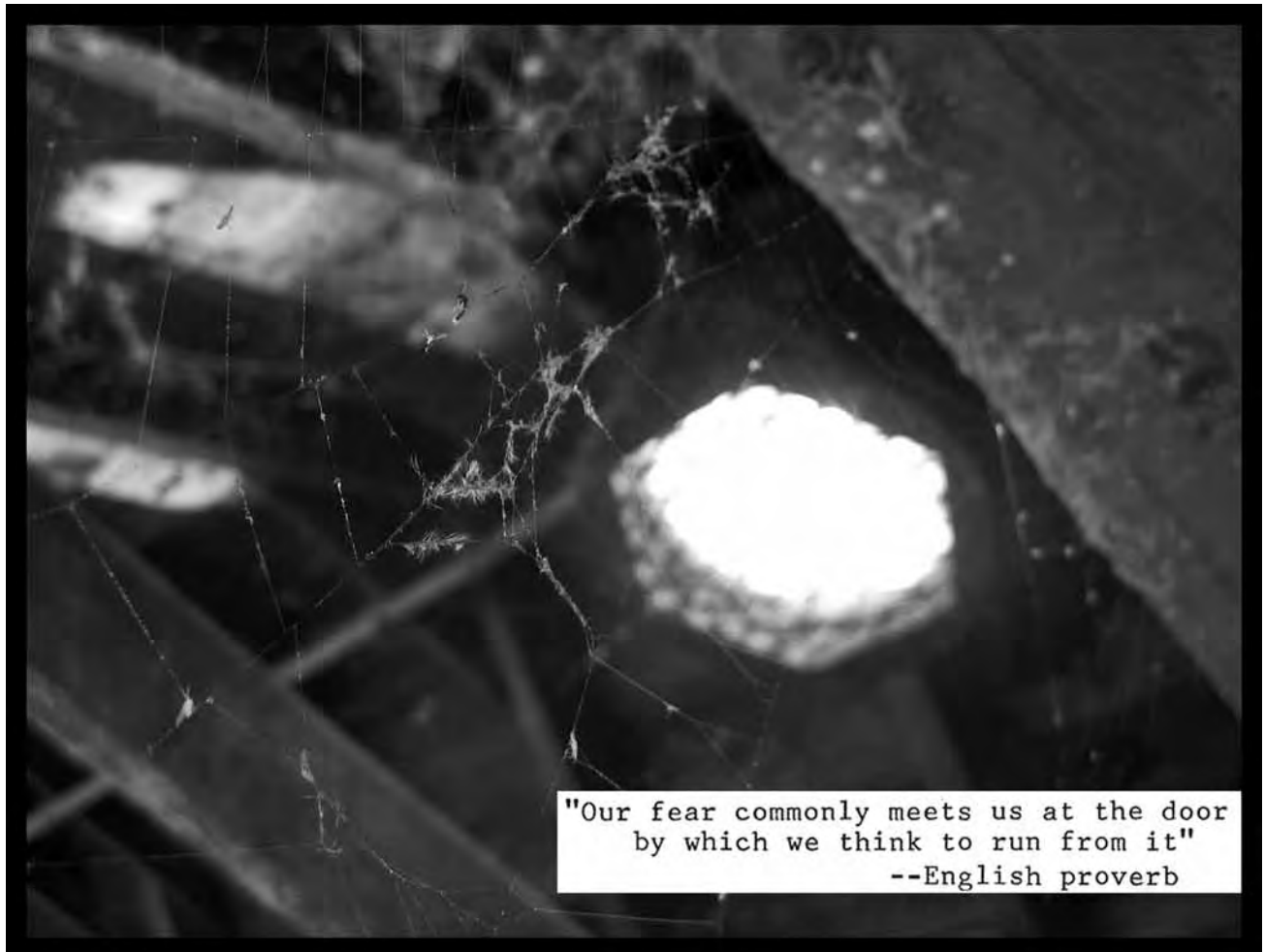


The Canacle



Number 79 ☸ October 2011



"Our fear commonly meets us at the door
by which we think to run from it"
--English proverb

Letter to President Barack Obama

October 23, 2011
Gourmet Express – my table
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This is the fifth in a series of letters I began writing to you back in 2008, when you were still running for your party's nomination for the presidency. This is my third annual letter to you since you took office as the President. Each of these letters is both mailed to you & published in the pages of my literary journal, *The Cenacle*.

Tonight, I took myself down to Dewey Square in Boston, near the Financial District, where Occupy Boston is encamped. I witnessed a General Assembly in action, donated some of my press's volumes to the nice library there, & talked at length with some visitors from Occupy Wall Street.

What I saw was a brave tent city of people, many young, some not, experimenting with a kind of ad hoc communal living, surrounded by great edifices where a very few keep accounts stockpiling a great deal of wealth.

There were two things evident at Occupy Boston: the anger at the federal government for failing the many on behalf of the few, & the widespread hope that the Occupy Movement has returned to people's lives.

Many of these people last felt that hope during the 2008 campaign when you won the presidency. Those too were exciting times, rife with the feeling that we were kicking a criminal administration to the curb & ushering in a new one, & hopeful about the many more good things you would do on our behalf.

Three years after your election, your 2008 voters are angry, many jobless, & they are camped in Dewey Square, on Wall Street, & in dozens of cities around the country. A movement you gave energy & impetus has long tired of waiting for you, & passed on ahead to try and do for the 99% what you have all but failed to do.

That you perhaps staved off a depression in 2009, signed into law modest healthcare reform, drew down troops in Iraq & Afghanistan, ended Don't-Ask-Don't-Tell in the military, & a few other acts—these sit as small islands of accomplishment in your great black sea of concessions & failures. Even now, there is fresh news that your administration is benefitting big banks while millions inherit the bill.

Yet I have also noticed in recent months your more obvious frustration with & disdain for the partisan kneecapping of congressional business in Washington, D.C. Even with your somewhat bold American Jobs Act, you cannot get a simple floor vote in Congress because of partisan maneuvering.

Maybe you have finally figured out that your best intentions are up against deeply entrenched bastards who will cede you the least social gains for the greatest cost, & are now already counting down the days to your second term's finish. Your opponent next year will be a suited clown, & the election important only in how strong a Congress you are given back & what you will lose by redistricting.



"I DONT WANT TO Rule or Conquer anyone, I should
Like to help everyone if possible. Jew, Gentile, Blackman, or white.
We all want to help one another. Humans are like that. WE
all want to live by each others happiness, not by each others Misery.
We dont want to hate and despise one another. **IN THIS WORLD**
THERE IS ROOM FOR EVERYONE, the earth is rich and can pro-
vide for everyone. The way of life can be free and Beautiful.
BUT WE HAVE LOST THE WAY
Greed has poisoned men's souls: Has barricaded the world
with hate, has goose stepped us into misery and bloodshed.
We have developed speed, but we shut ourselves in. Machinery
that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has
made us cynical, our cleverness hard and unkind. **WE**
ARE TOO LITTLE

If we re-elect you, it will only be to avoid a Republican gaining the office & resuming George W. Bush's destruction of the social safety net. It will not be like in 2008 when so many of us believed in you & what good you would do in office. No, it will be a return to the "lesser of two evils" voting strategy. Do you realize you're devolving from the candidate of hope & change, the "Yes We Can!" candidate, to the lesser of two evils? Some in Dewey Square would not even cede that you are so much lesser.

One way to understand the message the Occupy Movement is sending you is by considering the word "occupy." A benign word, at least in some of its several definitions, it can imply simple space taking, passive dwelling. Not necessarily a word of fight or even resistance. More a word of right. Simple right. Each being on this planet, of any kind, even as it passes from one form to another, has a *right to occupy*—

& in so saying, the purpose of Occupy is to realize fully that each of us here already does this, not at the discretion of a mortgage or a rental agreement, but as a *truth*. Each of us occupies this world. *We belong to it, & it to each & every one of us*. To all created entities. Those that would tend against this truth oppose their world itself. I can't deduce it any more simply.

If you indeed have renewed stomach for the fight ahead, knowing now better than you did in 2008, your task hereon is to wrack in word & deed against those who would deny some their right to occupy. Your early missteps, your slow realization of the scale & scope & seriousness of those who oppose you, might be forgotten by at least some who come to feel that you are maturing & seeing what the rest of us see: that these entrenched bastards will simply wait you out unless you ally yourself, like King & Kennedy before you, with as many millions of every kind & place as you can. You did this in 2008. It's why you are in the White House.

What faces you are the following questions: in a nation of laws, not a nation of men, whose laws shall we abide by? Those in the interest of some, most, or everyone? Laws are simply sentences with public authority backed by a combination of agreement & guns.

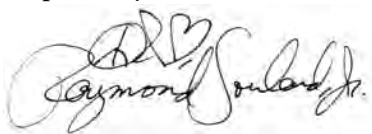
Yet by laws—which exist, which do not, & how enforced, & on whom, & not on whom—, is nakedly revealed what a society (& especially its power-bearers) thinks of itself. They offer a moral temperature, & codify it for a time, till the temperature shifts, as it always does.

The final question for you, to look to answer in your later years, is whether or not you settled for a small peace, a somewhat prosperity, or if you met the challenge to include all, as hard & dirty & stupid as this will seem to do at times, include all in gaining & asserting anew each's right to occupy?

I cannot but hope that you will try with all of your might, act like people not elections matter, & still realize, this far along, the potential we all felt you possessed three years ago. We can & will Occupy despite the bastards in D.C. & elsewhere. We would much rather you yourself found a collaborative place in our ranks.

The time is now, my friend. There's so much work to do.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Raymond Souland, Jr." with a stylized, cursive script.

Raymond Souland, Jr.
Scriptor Press New England



The Cenacle

Number 79 ☸ October 2011

Edited by Raymond Soulard P.D.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Soulard

MANY MUSICS [POETRY] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [☸]	1
A TRAVEL TO BELIZE [JOURNAL] by Charlie Beyer	19
POETRY by Ric Amante	37
THE TRANSCENDALIST [CLASSIC ESSAY] by Ralph Waldo Emerson	41
PHOTOGRAPH GALLERY by Walter Smith	52
POETRY by Judih Haggai	55
NOTES FROM NEW ENGLAND [COMMENTARY] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [☸]	61
POETRY by Martina Newberry	71
LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION] by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [☸]	77
POETRY by Tom Sheehan	125
EXCERPT FROM ACID CHRIST: KEN KESEY, LSD, & THE POLITICS OF ECSTASY [ESSAY] by Mark Christensen	131
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	138

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2011

Front and back cover art by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Soulard. Original *Cenacle* logo by Barbara Brannon. Interior art by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Soulard, except where otherwise indicated.

Accompanying disk to print version contains:

- *Cenacles* #47-79
- Burning Man Books #1-66
- *Scriptor Press Sampler* #1-12
- *RaiBooks* #1-7
- RS Mixes from “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution”; &
- Jellicle Literary Guild Highlights Series

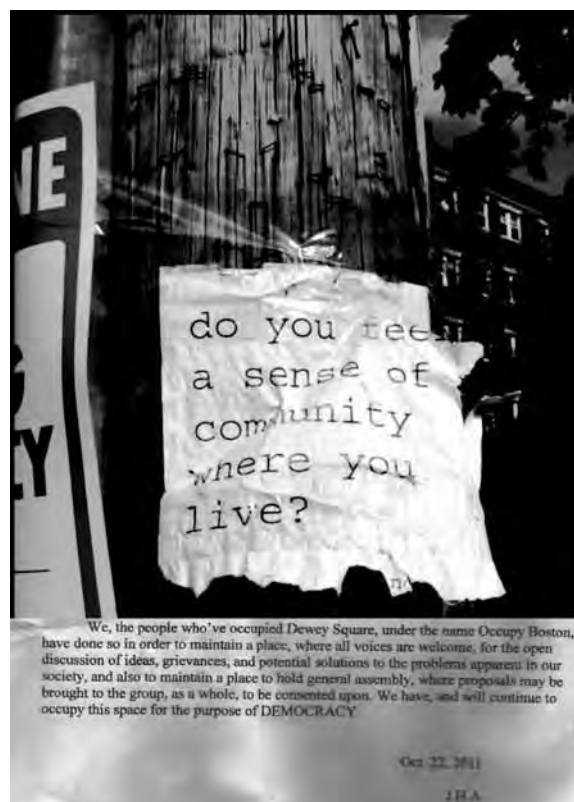
Selected disk contents downloadable at:

http://www.scriptorpress.com/cenacle/supplementary_disk.zip

The Cenacle is published quarterly (with occasional special issues) by Scriptor Press, 2442 NW Market Street, #363, Seattle, Washington, 98107. It is kin organ to ElectroLounge website (<http://www.scriptorpress.com>), RaiBooks, Burning Man Books, *Scriptor Press Sampler*, The Jellicle Literary Guild, & “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution w/Soulard,” broadcast online worldwide weekends on SpiritPlants Radio (<http://radio.spiritplants.org>). All rights of works published herein belong exclusively to the creator of the work. Email comments to: editor@scriptorpress.com

This issue is dedicated to all of the people contributing to the Occupy movement, in the US and around the world. More information can be found at <http://www.occupytogether.org>

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Seventh Series

*"There's no final answer."
—Dr. Timothy Leary,
Radio interview, 1986.*

xxxi. What Will You Do Now?

[Jim Dine, "Two Big Black Hearts," bronze, 1985]

He'd built long ago what I'd found half-sunk
in the snowy wood, two great black steel hearts,
cried from his shaping tools deep in molten flesh,
the air buzzing around this work still,
nature not easily accepting it back.

I push away what I can of its icy crust,
study his symbols. The ones I know,
hand, knife, bed, bowl, while others remain
his secret tongue, now dead with him.

One heart tells his youth, romance, full moons,
song. The face turned away from him in dance,
even as her hands cling to his neck & shoulder.
Speeding carriages, city lights, the hours when
a curious god traced closely through him.
That great tree, her light breathing,
nearly weightless things expiring in his grasp.

The other heart tells of dust, a violent hour,
endurance later. Too many words,
too many empty beds, the wane of faith
in the words of books & living men.
The lost symbols no longer step lightly,
turn in, turn bitter, find nights only wanting.

Forest & time obscured his tale, years taking
back as they do, & every spring exposing,
inches upon feet, what upheld his great work,
going, it was even then slowly going.



And more since I've seen this work, or
 thought on it, until this morning when I woke,
 through a dream of birds, clouds of them
 about my room, flying my mind, calling out:
 "Why are you leaving me here? Will you abandon
 me to be consumed? What will remain of you then?"

xxxii. Empathy

Before the sniff of your skin, taken
 by my genes through my nose,
 before the shape of your breast,
 already cupped, worried, had hard
 & soft, your eyes. Oh yes, I go for
 your eyes, not because I'm in them
 for you, or will be, but because I'm in them
 for me. You taste a little salty,
 like every woman, like one touch better
 than another, like every, carry your
 secret place without borders, like, you are sweet,
 as you pass, smiling with your friends,
 bound for laughing what now or brooding
 what later. Bound with the glances that salve
 & those that stripe. Bound, to how the glances
 fence & fill in. Which words, how many,
 who far—

I lean back, as I let you up, straightening back
 into your clothes as I do not, wondering
 what we did in my mind. How was it.
 That moment in passing, carnal weighted,
 as I continue helping you dress, as restoring
 you to girlish order matters most, seeing you
 on your way, a young night, your friends
 pointing to a door. That's where we're going. Hurry!

xxxiii. Cumulation

Not from the strength of it
 draw what you need. The brutal places
 of power & beauty. These pass, one to another,
 nothing more than leased to know,
 & the earth takes back by shine & soil.

Would you know power, you would know
 your weakness, chase down its hours
 & rivulets, face its pains. Acknowledge its pleasures.
 Nothing builds long & true that does
 not root in your soul's deep earth,
 climb from your dankest places, learn
 how to root among others, what binds each
 to the wheel.

Find it there, where looking is the hardest,
 from its clay build not a world but
 the steps to one, would you carry on still true.

xxxiv. Mist on the Mountain Top

Mist on the mountain top &
 so much to explain.
 The ways men lean, & clash, &
 crush to know each other.

Mist on the mountain top &
 how to explain.
 The dig of desire in these daylight hours,
 its claw through the glances & limits.

Mist on the mountain top &
 nothing to explain.
 If you have someone to kiss, then kiss.
 If you don't, reach a hand for what
 you can. You are loved more than you know.

xxxv. *After Rothko*

The space between you & me, wide as the
 wide midnight sea. Close as the breath
 I will squeeze in your lips when one day you
 are dying & I am come to say goodbye.
 Many of our borders are spiked, but one
 will soften, as you die, as you let go,
 as I watch, an empty shore come dawn.

xxxvi. *Hylozoism*

"Change rooms in your mind for a day."
 —Hafiz

Hurry, say the word empathy, the worlds
 wait & you are near. You are loved more
 than you are known sings the moonlight's
 soothe, worlds wait, hurry, say the word
 empathy. To become known you will reach
 your hand into the dreaming darkness,
 its snapping depths, soft thigh's croon
 for an hour or more, hard things thrashing
 for anger's relief, some god's secret conjure
 for release. Hurry, say the word empathy,
 loved more than you are known, you will cry
 into brilliant eyes, the lights, the trees,
 everything exploding with this feeling too.
 Worlds wait, you are near, & the remaining
 question, when harmonies of stars thin,
 & the predawn chill sweets in, would you choose
 to be loved or to be known, if but one alone?

xxxvii. Love Dogs

There were two tomes. One told the sky.
 One sang the earth. Was this a choice?
 Like left hand or right, & dispose the other.

xxxviii. Turn in Musics

Five white oaks & a prone, cold body in the sun.
 The meadow waving riot to any story
 one could tell of this. Only breaches in the web.

xxxix. World is Not Conclusion

Breaches in the web, look through
 & see the rain falling on other worlds.
 Go on, there are no answers here but patterns
 of bird flight & blood on the lips at waking.
 No answers to this curtained savagery,
 just tonight's fears bleeding tomorrow's canvas.

xl. Idiot's Song

No answers here but patterns of bird flight
 & blood on the lips at waking, from dreams
 of heaven where lines form & no good answers
 come anyway. I turn to the one behind me,
 a girl whose ass I would have hungered
 in that other life. "Me too" she says.

Of course there's blood. Blood is the hardest.
 Returning to the festival, I see that new.
 The collected wounds erected as tents &
 shaped in flames. Next morning, see what
 remains, fill in the rest. There'll be rains
 to wash the worst, & music of course for rags.

xli. Dark Patches

We each know the dark patches,
 yet still dress apart & walk wordless
 astride each other, keep the roughest ache
 close, love it like very life, like it will
 release us to flights arcing over this how,
 this why, a secret crucial bridge
 to some other beginning, new knowing,

wild forgetting, a medicine come from stars,
 grown within, like a healing fruit,
 discovered solely searching inner forests,
 this balm grasped in both hands &
 with a hungry cry bitten into, how fierce
 its pains yet finally, *fucking finally*,
 the way two arisen become one, not

the drinks we took deep of books, their
 waters discovered at last poisoned,
 no, this knowledge, its cost, but yes!
 a name for what gives breath like song
 to all, a name! waiting to love you
 all our lives, wake fearless, undefeated,
 & an hour come to show you my dark
 patch, my love, my two loves, my many loves,
 reveal me as you know but far more beautiful instead.



xlii. Holy! Holy! Holy!

He said our world is made of language,
 it's what we know, & nodded. I say let me
 soothe your heart & change your mind.
 I say I'm dragging my long history & yours
 along, yes, & the generations of white oaks, &
 the million gnats egging up tomorrow, & the stars
 exploding in tonight's blessed skies, & the centuries
 of centuries past & many times that to come,
 the air too cold for thought & the poisons
 subtler than that, world is made of language
 he said as though no crazy cock in my or wild cunt
 in yours, colors I look through for, old smells
 that hunt me, tastes I'm deeply unsure of,
 my tongue, my touch, when I've been fatter,
 when I've been hurt, sometimes my metaphorical
 heart but sometimes worse, those hours empty
 of dream & do, but now let me soothe your heart,
 let me change your mind, I too would forget
 every shift contacts every other shift, & me too,
 yes, in my lowliness as you in your certainty,
 my times of loathe, yours of grind & cry, are they songs?
 Let them, & some more, they could become nocturnes
 architected from dreams of ice & sugar, first orgasm,
 next orgasm, best orgasm, sing with me! Know less
 & less, & sing! Singing grasps it all & language
 just the visible exhaust, oh, I pray for you
 with your books & podiums & houses easy
 to burn in the cosmic sense, but say tonight
 may the universe yield you better too.

xliii. Song of Ragged Claws

I met you in a dream of desolation
 & later knew you better. In the dream
 we were young, combatants with big ideas,
 singing, ragged figures in the rain, you said
 “a game, this universe?” I nodded from atop
 my great railroad rock. “Time + play!”

Later you were on cassette tapes, made because
 you were cowardly & far from me. Better beers
 in Germany than England. Better whores in Thailand.
 You’d given me a device in that first dream,
 it would attach to your strange cassettes so
 I could play & listen. Then began the new songs.

Imagine wordless crooning begins, low as ground,
 one quiet thing among many, but rises, yes,
 at some point rises & is now for attention,
 still wordless, but yes, you were recalling
 the dream to me, the one of desolation, yes,
 & now there were words I remembered,

*“Ragged claws, ragged claws, a mind sliced
 away & revealed, ragged claws, ragged claws,
 those walls aren’t high enough to protect
 the world from me, my music is bark
 & root, I’ll travel by the soil, sup on the starlight.
 Ragged claws, a mind sliced & revealed.”*

They kept coming, these cassettes, one labeled
Vodka Notes, another *Labia Dreams*. Once blank
 & I listened through twice. Less filled each time.
 You were confessing it. Minute by conceded minute.
 I told noone. I have lain wide-eyed in the sweetest
 breathing breasts & said nothing. You were hid in my beats.

The cassette labeled *Last Songs* came to me,
 too fucking easy this, after another of those
 dreams. I was him again, the one who finds
 the freak beast in the prettiest girls, coaxes,
 coaxes, coaxes, holds the mirror high until mirrors
 is all there are. Sweat, snap.

I don't drink anymore & I go to my old bar.
 I go to my old table to listen, order nothing,
 say nothing, go there to listen from
 the light of a city in autumn's clean unfurling
 into the smoldering poisoned dim, go there
 to listen—

I don't know if you'd call them songs, & the cassette
 is gone now. Was he in the desert? There was hard wind.
 Maybe ocean? His voice sounded wet & far.
 There was the squalling of instruments or
 electronics, a band? Words emerged that
 I knew. *Ragged claws. Time + play.* Slower.

I played it again, like I always did,
 but it sounded different, it was melting
 the player you'd given me, melting it in
 my hands but I kept listening as the goo
 rotated in my hands & onto the table.
 Not desert. Not ocean. Meteors. Leaving.

And I'll just ask you now & plain,
 have you discovered & lost your best friend
 in a dream? I'll tell you this much:
 it wasn't until that morning that
 I finally came off that railroad rock
 & conceded the world, walked out that
 barroom door, cassette player bile on
 my fingers, into common day.

xliv. That Sensual Music

"How can we get to know each other?"

"By abolishing frontiers between states."

—Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia*, 1983.

There is no higher & there is no ground
 we kiss. Across the abyss. And you are
 mine once more. I wake. And, no,
 you're not. Your ruining kiss, your eyes of
 sky above me, among the stars, that's how
 this was, cars passed your window,
 endless traffic, I watched you breathing
 & dreaming. Your skin in simple yellow
 street lights. I was moaning.

There were three of you that first day, just
 pretty girls splashing their faces in the fountain
 of that square. Bold & young, you sat on my bench
 & asked me whose letter I sat reading. You among
 the three watched my eyes, followed them not to
 your blouse or legs, or the others, but to the
 fountain. You came back later, alone, knew I would
 be there still, knew the letter wasn't from a lover,
 as I'd said. Love sniffs for good soil that way.

A new dream. A bigger dream. No longer
 a dream at all. Forgetting what I was
 in becoming what you wished. That first
 night we shared your white blanket
 with the touch of elephant tooth yellow,
 I did no more than hold you, like who
 I would be would do, I discovered him in
 your eyes among the stars, biting & laughing.
 Discovered I liked your moan, you out of breath.

No other. No other. Your breath. Your moans.
 Your sigh. Your kiss. I'd sit by that fountain
 where we met & your words would slip
 in seeds & leaves from the sky & I would
 let them scatter round me, cover the bench
 where you & the others had sat looking at my
 letter & considering my face. They said later I looked
 lost but you didn't think so. You knew
 I lived on that bench not in your bed.

"Remember everything but lightly"

you told me near the end, you'd brought
the other two around, ready to share
me as I was leaving, taste him,
taste this, this is how it was, this is
what he was to me, it's not down there,
you won't find it doing that or touching,
or showing him what, here, smell
this white blanket, it's in the yellow threads.

There is no higher & there is no ground,
drink the fountain spray before we kiss.
Across the abyss you can see what I've seen
all along, the nothing of cum sprayed
in your friends' faces. Drink the spray,
& you are mine once more. Now, eventually,
you see me as I was that day, & always
been, your eyes closing, you see me
underneath, now smiling, your lips
moist with spray, your ruining kiss,
yes, receiving back & back into you,
back & back, no higher, no ground,
kiss, across the abyss & I am yours once more.



xlvi. Iconic Square

It was years ago yet I wonder if they
do it even now. Say what you will, someone
did dose the fountain waters of Iconic Square
with LSD. Lightly, like brushing the drums
of many minds, not pounding them awake.

I watched. Many many days I watched
as people dipped dry hands or dusty feet
into those waters. Those pretty girls splashing
their faces & laughing. Old folks tossing up
pennies & smiling into the spray.

I watched the years of watching turn
toward wanting again. Old gleams. Old furies.
Return of violence, return of tenderness.
A medicine come not from stars, nor from dreams,
but within, where there is no higher & there is no ground.

But more. Iconic Square's in a major city,
I won't say where, & surrounded by government
offices & corporate headquarters. That spray
touched important cheeks, drip dropped from
the hands of diplomats, into treaties & disputes,
what abiding fears bleeding tomorrow's canvas.

And I wondered. Sitting on a bench, shadowed
by an oak tree, watching, dosed high on
the sunshine & the smiles & the sweating musicians
who played better & weirder through the afternoon,
music the rags a poor man will wear proudly,
music is heartache at rest, playing less & less
for coins & bills, more & more for sky-smacking bliss,
fuck I wondered. A light dose if it touched
your skin casually. Enough to change a mind,
soothe a heart, jar a sure hate? Breaches in
the web, if you believe in webs & who does—

No, it wasn't me. I wasn't so brave, or connected
to the powers over the pipes. I found out by
accident on the day would have been my last.
I drank there while going. A bridge in my mind,
a note in a plastic bag in my pocket. Drank there
on whim, twice because a tug in my heart
still saw a chance the rest didn't. Wavering thing.

I'd known the place I'd be going for a long time,
 good to be able to arc over this hour to where
 you will end & some other beginning, a bridge
 not too big or trafficked but it was high, so high,
 oh so high, look at the sky *high oh so high*—

The river below forgotten I looked straight up
 & kept looking, crawled off the bridge into
 a hidden grassy area, tugged there by my heart,
 & kept looking up, twisted around to see better,
 this is what I'd wanted so long, to look up
 from this place. Become a mind as common
 where all are welcome. Heartache at rest.

When had I stopped looking up? What day,
 which hour? Whose word had made me
 look down & never quite so up again, was
 it hers, yours, my cum still on your lips,
 saying you loved me & goodbye, still nude
 with me on the floor, still taut for fucking?
 "I'm not fucking her, you fucking *dreamed* her!"

Was it him, you, that letter you wrote far
 from me, coward, about your disease &
 your decision? Your cassette labeled
Last Songs that I listened to the night
 you passed from me & the last of our hungry
 hours arguing if God's best final proof
 is music, oak trees, or fine young ass?

There were other reasons & many excuses
 & every last one fell unnoticed from me
 as I watched the sky into its inexplicable
 dusk, into its crying passion told each night as
 stars, I passed through seeing up & was up,
 became up, finally up, *swinging high, oh so*
high from the strands above the stars
that dangle down so low———

Dirty, broken, remade, smiling, I swung
 until the dawn, finding myself where
 I'd ended & begun in a new way, unexpected,
 fine, & I knew enough to trace a path
 back to that fountain, those few splashes
 of sweet drink, & I returned to marvel.

I didn't leave for a long time, though rarely
 drank again. When hunger got me &
 my cup was empty. When it got cold &
 I chose not to tent with the huddled rest.
 When my dreams obscurely advised & my heart
 lightly tugged & then tugged a little more.

When I left it felt tragic. A car wreck
 full of burning bodies large & small.
 The delighted king when barriers to
 his blood lust fall, when his word & fist
 sum to first & only beautiful truth.

I left & am now far gone to that fountain
 in Iconic Square. I dream on it still,
 on weak nights, & wonder who opened
 the taps, how did they find the way to
 let the elixir in? How? Why the light dose?
 Did anyone figure it out like me?
 Does it go on? Are the grim men on TV,
 at podiums, doubting a little? Are tall buildings
 governed by secretly grinning goofs?

There are only two tomes.
One tells the sky.
One sings the earth.

Are there fewer fists in the world
 tonight? *Does it still try to save us all?*



* * * * *



Charlie Beyer


A Travel to Belize

[Journal]

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 78 | June 2011)

Into Mexico

We are all traumatized at one point or more in our lives, of which consequence shapes our future reactions in a paranoid spasm of terror. For myself, I decline to mention. For Kim, it was being the helplessly trapped passenger hurtling towards doom. Her drunken father used to load the family into the car for a “drive,” which careened around Alaskan mountain roads, scooping the margins next to precipitous thousand-foot drop offs. She used to yell furiously at me on the tame and controlled Boise freeways if some laconic potato-head cut in front of us (more from their inattentive stupidity than from intention). Now she is thrust into a *Mad Max* Mexican stock car race.

The road is two lanes with eight-foot paved shoulders. On this shoulder drive the slower *transmigrantes*, towing as they are, while the wilder unencumbered cars and trucks race around, partly in the oncoming lane. This is also occurring in the other direction, making the road into a four-lane freeway. But the middle lanes are twelve feet wide, so it is also possible for some maniac to pass the passers by gunning it up the middle. Hence, a five-lane road out of two. Efficient as this may seem, Kim somehow fails to see the scientific purity of the situation, and claws the dashboard apart while screaming *Charliee!!*—as if to dissuade my conviction to do as others do in this foreign country. The situation is exacerbated by ample chuck-holes, swerved around at the last instant. Thus the view from the front window is one of 60 mph cars, trucks, and junk heaps weaving wildly all over the road, passing on the left and right, and even on the left of incoming traffic. Yes, it is a bit unnerving at first, but I plod along at 50, taking my potholes with aplomb, letting the others do as they must in their frenetic velocity.

Between desperate gasps for breath, we must consider our route. The crappy general map shows the turn off to La Pesca at some indistinct place called Dos Pueblos. Can we even find that? All the signs of course are in Spanish and not particularly plentiful. I am still recalculating kilometers per hour into mph so I don't break the speed limit, as if this was a matter of concern with the rest mashing their foot to the floor. But we are *anglos*, with US plates, sure bait for any official nearby. Though we see no looming black horizons of the hurricane, we decide to stay to the inland, getting to the city of Victoria before dark. This is the preferred drug lord luxury residence city, much as Sedona is for Arizona. Here is the heart of the cartels. Hmmm. Weighing driving in the dark out here with chuck-holes and maniacs, with an assured hurricane camping spot which we can't reach before dark, against a few cocaine crazed drug lords. No contest. We'll camp in the narcotics capital. Kim reads in the junior woodchuck guidebook, under *Victoria Camping*, that there is a nice walled RV stop in the center of the city. Anna, she says the proprietor is, but later changes her story to Maria. The

books says that Maria is a super welcoming warm person, speaks English and invites all in to play poker. This sounds good. By the time we have figured all that out, including confusing directions, we are long past the other turn-off anyway, although there was no trace of it. Kim shuffles through two dictionaries, trying to decipher the few signs that there are. This keeps her eyes mostly off the road, leaving me to do the majority of white knuckling. I find the driving and translating quite stimulating for the mind.

In thirty miles we come to a very scary *Federales* check point. Herded through a tight blockade, we are stopped and all our papers are checked by a humorless police dressed all in black with blacker machine guns, grenades, pistols, everything. In five breathless minutes we are through. Calls for a ceremonial cigarette. Another military check point awaits us thirty kilometers down the road. They surround us and climb into the back of the truck, looking for guns or criminals. Through that also without incident. Flashing the *transmigrante* paperwork at them seems to help. Another ceremonial cigarette. The sky reddening we reach the outskirts of Victoria, and roll slowly into town. The woodchuck guide gives remarkably accurate directions to this. Cross the bypass, right at the main boulevard, backtrack at the fourth return, (a U-turn spot in the boulevard), right through the walled gate of Annie's. The traffic is thick in this evening time, and a carnival of some sort further jams thing up. But we do so, and pull into the inner city sanctuary of Annie/Maria's through a rusted gate.

This is like some sort of colonial archeological site. If there ever were happy travelers in RVs here, playing cards with Maria to mariachi music, the memory of it is lost under a carpet of rampant growth and neglect. A huge rotted colonial house sits to the right, the vines and trees gripping its crumbling sides and pulling it slowly to the ground. Beyond is an acre with exotic trees, apparent slots for RVs, and a winding road that become almost a trail from the land crawl grass. We all immediately piss behind the truck, including Molley the dog who craps also, hopefully unnoticed. Timidly, we approach the relic house in a rock-jumbled yard interlaced with creepers. *Hellooo! Halloooo!* We quietly call. *Billy! Billllieeee!* We hear back from the second floor of the mansion. *Billy! Get yer ass downstairs and see who's there. Where the hell are you, boy? Unna, unaa, here, Ma.* A gangly awkwardly lurching 40-something man stumbles out of a lower doorway toward us. He has the eyes of the insane, distant, rolling around in the sockets, never looking directly at you. It's as though his world of vision is painted on a constantly moving sphere.

Can we get a camping spot for the night?

Maaaaa! I'm mua-mua-muooving the car.

You idiot! Get outta that car! We look up and see Maria on the slanting second-story porch.

Hello there! Are you Maria? We'd like to rent a camp spot for the night.

Yess . . . yesss. In a spider-like tone. *I'll be right down.* In the shadows, she seems a dark blob, appearing and disappearing in the hanging vegetation of the porch. *Billllieeee! Fetch the book!* Billy has been standing stupidly next to the car waiting for further instructions. Maria appears all smiles into the tangle of what was once a patio. She is short, cylindrical, in a full dress of complex design, not unlike a Mexican monolith carved with the secrets of the past. She does speak fair English, and we exchange pleasantries. A few gunshots are heard out there in the streets, followed by a crash of crumpling metal, then a symphony of honking and yelling. It is no more noticed than a bird chirping in a tree. For two hundred pesos our signatures are recorded in the guest book. We can camp anywhere, it doesn't matter, drive anywhere. With

mutual thanks and smiles, she recedes back into the covered gloom of the house.

Billy steps between us before we can reach the truck. *I know American*, he says. *I watch TV! Barrack Obomba. Hilly Clinton. CBS. NBC. FOX. Afghanistan, Middle East, Iraqi, Pakistan, White House, Congress, Tea Party, Homeland Security, Iowa, Hollywood, Swartzinigger, credit defaults, mortgage crisis, international monet . . .*

Billiee! Oh. Mama call. Gotta go.

Damn, not a moment too soon. We hurriedly move the truck to the farthest corner of the property and set about putting up the tent and a tarp over it. It is getting dark almost instantly. The tent up, and the bed-roll rolled out, cat box inside, then free the cats, fling them in the tent, and zip it up. Mosquitoes and other unseens are chewing the hell out of us. Molley on her rope mixing into everything, hooking its food bowl and spilling contents wastefully. All it wants to do is run and bark and be an asshole.

Then a moment of magic. All over the now black lawn are little glowing moving lanterns. Huge fireflies are everywhere. I walk out among them, hoping Kim will be as interested as I am. A streak of light, another the opposite way. Beautiful to me. One is stuck under a flap on the tent. The small cat is leaping wildly at it from the inside. Camp more or less squared up, we decide to walk down to the grocery store. Molley barks desperately as we walk off, leaving it tied with the half-inch line to the truck.

Outside is the chaos of the city. The boulevard traffic is still bumper-to-bumper 60, with pedestrians dashing back and forth across it, motorcycles weaving in and out. Walking along the side of it is pretty hairy. We make it to the intersection after skirting heaps of garbage, mud holes, swerving motorists, and leaning clusters of low-eyed men, lounging listlessly. At the intersection, three armored Humvee-type things loaded with black-dressed masked soldiers erupt in a scream of sirens and lights. They swing their pivot guns on any nearby traffic and barge into the intersection, roaring down one of the avenues. It is a fearsome display.

Finally to the grocery store. I want some authentic fast food. A quickie counter there, with ten items listed. All indistinguishable. The biggest discussion ever had commences about vegetarian, *no pollo, no carne*. They have never heard these words since the earth was created. *Could we get a burrito? Frijole burrito?* They have never heard of a "burrito." Finally, some glimmer over taco. Kim gets a tortilla the size of coffee cup, wiped with some strange paste. I get two chicken tacos, which are two more of these, wiped with a thin layer of some other paté. More raving to get a drop of hot sauce. Then to pay. 67 pesos. I know they are ripping us off, but don't know how to argue it. Works to something like two dollars a taco that barely covered my tongue.

The grocery shopping a little better, can't read anything, but an apple is still an apple. Bread . . . bread, just take our lumps at the register. The way back we find is in the center of the boulevard, a path through trees. A few unsavory types in the shadows, but nothing unusual. Back at Maria's, a locked eight-foot chain link fence bars the way. The hell with it, we'll climb it. My pants hang on top and do the butt cheek rip, but we're over and into safety. Out of the darkling gloom emerges a black spindly figure. *America!* It announces. *Land of the free . . . Home of the . . .*

Billieeee! screamed from the moldering balcony. He spins on his heels and heads dutifully into the black. This is without doubt the Central American version of *Psycho*. Mom's not quite a mummy yet, but I can envision Billy wielding a steak knife quite nicely.

The air is dead and heavy at the tent. At least seventy-five pounds per cubic foot. It's

ninety-five degrees out, and humidity near thick as fog. Great flashes of lighting rent the sky a far distance away—the pounding of the hurricane fifty miles coastward. In the tent, it is a clammy sauna. Ten degrees hotter with all the bedding soaked from downpours on the road. Everything smells like cat piss. We melt in misery. Not a breath of movement. Fireflies blink against the tent walls.

In a few hours, yelled to an awaking. *Charliee! Do something! The tarp has blown off.* Dripping from sweat and slime from the cat piss sponge, I leap out into the night naked. Yes, the wind is now flapping and tearing at everything. The hurricane's edge. Everywhere I try to sink a stake, there is concrete underneath the veneer of vegetation. Kim is all pissed off and yelling one thing or another which must be ignored. Finally some semblance of cover is made, and the first drops come.

Over the next hour, seventy billion gallons fall out of the sky. It is now 300% humidity. The water comes in the walls, through the covered windows, just is . . . everywhere. Now like living in an outhouse. Blinding flashes and skull-tearing thunder claps hammer on us through the gusher. Molley is totally crazy. We are no better. Then everything stops. Utter blackness. Dead calm. The temp is only ninety now. Wallow till daybreak, a seemingly 400-hour-long night.

In the morning, everything is so much wetter than the wetness before. The urgency to get on the road is on us. Have to make Tampico and beyond. We are bitchy. I roll up the bed that is now over three hundred pounds, two hundred being water. Molley runs off, which gives us an avenue to scream and abuse something. When we get the hog-tied canine back, we find the cat has escaped from the truck. Two inches of window down is enough to squeeze its peanut head through and leap. A calling calling thing. I see a wisp disappearing around a corner, and she is captured in an abandoned cabana with much squalling and flailing resistance. Everyone mashed into the truck.

Out into the madcap traffic of morning. The gas station appears to be a black zoot suit police encampment. I get gas there anyway, still too stupid to fear them properly. There is debate on how to read the map and hook up with the highway south, which is unmarked anywhere in reality. Finding some unmarked intersection on the edge of town, one line of argument says to head north. I don't like it. The road is empty. Feels bad. Up ahead a roadblock of machine-gun toting irregulars can be seen. Not good. Amazingly, there is a turn around just here, about a quarter mile from the doom. I do it. Heading south now anyway. Get through the intersection and find some indication that we are on the road south. We think all is grand now.

It appears we are on some alternate highway that will at some point connect up with the main 101. Conveniently, they name all highways 101; in this way there is no confusion. The land is amazing. Large lush valleys surrounded by towering mesas. Fields of agave, tall and pointy, waiting to become some soured mind's solace in swilled mescal. Climbing to the top of the mesa land, the whole of Mexico seems lain out before us. One can imagine blue- jade-clad Olmec priests here, surrounding a smoky fire, paying homage to some giant-head god . . . 8000 years ago. But down we must go, to skirt along the coast to destinations deep and beyond.

The road down takes over an hour for its twenty-five miles, twisting and clinging to cliffs. But we have the place mostly to ourselves, which is pleasant. Finally we are on the flat, ratty sugar cane all around, and find the connection to 101.

The road now becomes more frantic. The traffic is pretty steady both ways, causing

many hair-brained passings. Also, the road is just exactly two lanes wide, with shoulders that are an eight-inch pavement drop off into a jungle swamp. We plod along at 50, unwavering. Almost constantly there is some wide-eyed intent-driven pseudo-wreck, plugging my mirrors, wallering out into the left lane every minute or so, checking for passability. The usual result finds the maniac snapping back in behind me like a spooked hermit crab. I have to ignore this drama or be driven insane with visions of the impending wreckage. The road can barely be twenty feet across and is made of up to four layers. There are potholes everywhere. Some are single divots right in the tire lane, but most are clusters spanning two-thirds of the lane. A few can be avoided with a judicious swerve at the last moment, but the wheels are predominantly doomed to slam into the hole at 50 mph. Between the holes is a patch work of broken layers of asphalt, concrete, and loose rock. Holes start around hat size, average about the size to hide a basketball in, and proudly surprise you with some craters sufficient to disappear an ice cooler. As the road is such a mosaic of lithified crap, it is hard to tell what or where a hole is. Compounding further are beautiful shadows from the overhanging jungle, making holes appear to be where there are none, and concealing others. Some indication of the shock to come can be gathered by watching the truck ahead dynamite the brakes and swerve drunkenly.

Why should I be so concerned with this road? The truck is overloaded. The hover trailer is overloaded. Each shock reverberates up through the frame, rattling all those thousands of parts critical to keeping us going. How much of a beating can the Chevy suspension system take? Are these ragged-edge pocks taking chunks of rubber out of our tires? There is no hope of being able to pull over. When will the punishment stop?

Every five to twenty miles is another village. No, these are not picturesque adobe-walled streets with sombrero-sleeping burros and people in colorful serapes. This is a trash-strewn road, lined with eight-by-eight-foot stick shacks made of plastic bags and other garbage. A third or less of the shacks are occupied, with malevolent-looking people in rags, holding up slimy looking plastic bags of some fruit guts. In two to three places in these towns are *Topes*, or bumps. Not a little bump either, but about a foot high all across the road. The lower latitude's solution to velocity control. And it works. Almost everybody slows down to 2 mph to cross these, or risks having the transmission splattered. There are huge gouges in the *topes*, as testament to this process, often with an oil stain the size of a double bed. The *tope* sites are armed with vendors who don't bother with the malarial-looking shacks. Here their clientele is somewhat captured, having to slow to the 2 mph. Out they rush, yammering at our side window, while the sagging trailer scrapes over the bump. On rare occasions, the *tope* is signed, first with *Tope 100 Meters*, and then a sign that resembles two reclining breasts, just adjacent to the protrusion. But these are rare, and one must rely on the knowledge that there will be *topes* on either end, and in the middle, of the village. Usually they are painted but, in the general deterioration of this world, the paint has often long been obliterated. This causes many emergency slams of the brake, in which the hover slips ever more forward on the trailer, and the abs system lurches us to an emergency stop. About thirty percent of the time I slam into a *tope* because I'm rubbernecking the situation.

People are everywhere, but mostly standing on the edge of the pavement like moths waiting to be charred by the light bulb. They are not going anywhere, not waiting for anything, not crossing, just lurking like bad sign posts, occupying a square meter of space enhanced by the modern world, this road as if, by standing there, they become a part of this new technology.

So I'm trying not to mow down any of these loiterers, nor the starved rat-dogs



meandering about, nor the chickens (which look the healthiest), nor the clutches of children, bike riders, hobbling 200-year-old Mexicans, horses tied to the road edge, and assorted broken machinery. So my attention is drawn to the myriad detail before me as we enter a village. Then, suddenly beside me, “Bump!” is yelled, the brakes stomped, the cab lurches skyward, then the truck butt, then the smash of the trailer body bottom slamming the *tope* and dragging its screeching metal across it. If I cross at 1.5 mph, I can avoid the metal screech slam, but almost every one gets us.

Bandits

Tampico is a highway bottleneck along the coast. All the roads go through this one point. For a few miles, Highway 101 . . . becomes one. We hear much of the tickets handed out here by the local police. Sounds kinda bad, but much advice is written about the bypass to avoid the center of town and the worst of the ticketing agents. Turn at the big boat. On and on we go, into the jaws of Tampico. Around noon we come to the top of a hill on the town limits. There are ten or more police stopping almost everybody. We are stopped, obviously. We shove all our papers at them. Much excited waving of hands and proclamations of *tickito*, more excited babbling.

Get out of the truck, amigo. A few curious types look all around for what they can see in the back of the truck. More wrangling, but we are all on the level. The boss is called over, who lectures us in fragmented Spanish that the dog can't be up front, has to ride in the back. This is an infraction. I offer no money for this crime, nor agreement, nor co-operation of any kind. After some additional scare face time with the boss, he waves us on with a flourish of disgust. Dismissed . . . don't look at him. OoooK. We go. The cat is lost. Where is the cat? Fuck the cat, if it has run away during the “inspection,” it's on its own. We're outta there. Into the teeth of Tampico now. The road lined with one- and two-story ramshackle buildings, people, and cars everywhere in no discernable pattern. We pass a mini police station. On the edge of the road is a short fellow half dressed as a policeman, kaki pants, odd assortment of medals all over him. He is authoritatively waving us over. Yeah, right! He has no car anyway. I pretend I don't see him and roll steadily by. I can see him hopping mad in the rear view mirror, waving his stubby arms wildly, the medals flashing in the sun.

Somehow I get the truck and trailer into the right-hand lane. Suddenly we are at an intersection. There on the far side is the huge boat. Turn! Turn! I crank the wheel at the last second, getting onto the bypass road. It is a good road, a toll road actually. After a dozen miles we come to the tollbooth and pay some huge fee for the few miles. *We did it!* We think. Skirted Tampico! We cross a couple of low bridges, and then come into another crappy village. There are police everywhere, all dressed in black, all packing black machine guns, sinister-looking bastards. We are waved enthusiastically over.

A fierce burnt red-haired policewoman comes up to the window. Jabber, jabber. *Abh, no habla espanole.* Jabber, jabber, now with a maddened tone. We hand the paper file, which she digs through. *Vehículo permitio? Si, si,* handing it over. Now an eruption about that, while reaching in and tapping a spot on the window in front of me. Apparently I was supposed to place one or both of the stickers in the window. A violation. After a few more harsh words, she disappears with the file. We have kept the passports with us, hidden, so that is a small comfort.

Soon another male police shows up. Now he has the papers. He greets me with a

handshake like we're to be the best of buddies. Indicates to get further off the road, which I grudgingly do, knowing that the involvement is increasing. Now a barrage of words, not understood. Basically he claims to be making some sort of "deal" with me. Has me get out of the truck.

Have deal . . . yes . . . or no?

Well, yes . . . of course. But what is the deal?

No deal, then let's go! He indicates he will now haul me off to the prison.

Yes, deal.

Deal?

Si.

OK, OK, tres cintos.

What? A hundred.

Tres! Tres!

Oh no.

We are poor. Cannot do!

OK, let's go! Now handling his pistol and ushering me past the truck to a prison pig car.

OK, OK. Deal. Si, three hundred in the truck.

In truck?

Si. I go back to the side of the truck and dig out 300 pesos.

No pesos, dollars.

Oh no, it is pesos.

No! Dollars!

Let's go, let's go. He writes out \$300 US on a piece of paper. *Let's go!* Feigning toward the police car again.

To leave Kim and the animals crammed in this broiling cab, here on the side of the road, her unable to even drive the truck, even if she knew where to go, is unthinkable. The word is that if you can go to the chief at the station you'll be cut a better deal, but everything else has been harsher than predicted. And where the hell might that be and how long would that take? Days at a minimum, with some jail time for nothing involved. No way in three hells is that an option.

I have it, I have it, I tell the thief.

OK, OK, then an expectant pause.

I have to dig it out.

More of the pause.

In the boat.

Ohhh . . . such soothing words of wisdom to the pig. He takes this opportunity to escort an older *senora* and some children across the street. Such a magnanimous Spanish gentleman he is evoking. Then back to me to complete the rip off. I have the three \$100 bills, hand them to him as he body covers the transaction. Inspecting the bills, he finds a small tear.

Nother one. No good. Nother one.

No way! I erupt back before I realize what I'm doing.

OK, OK, let's go.

No. Done. That's it! No more. A quiet look on his face, a sort of resignation, then a casual wave of the hand and a body turn to address some other pulled-over bastard.

Passo? I say.

Si . . . passo. Don't have to tell me twice, I grab the papers from his hand and leap in the truck, carefully starting the engine and pulling out into the traffic without politeness. Kim grills me about how much I had to give him, the \$300 is a shock. A blow to our resources. She goes through the returned papers. The vehicular permit is gone. Because I didn't remove the stickers, it is in pristine shape and the bitch will sell it on the black market somehow. Now we are in violation. Now we are bona fide bandit-bait. The cat has been hiding under the seat.

The bypass is torn up, mostly massive rutted dirt road with chuck-holes the size of bathtubs. This goes on through swampy low-land for ten miles, us and other "bypass" fleecers grinding along at 20 mph. Eventually something more akin to pavement is reached, but it is also in dire condition, allowing a speed of only 40 tops. The usual maniacs blast by at 60, apparently in rental cars and insensitive to the thousands of potholes. A village every five miles it seems, invoking the crawl over the town *topes*, the picturesque rotted dwellings strewn with garbage and laconic population.

At one point, a toll bridge. Some stupid amount of pesos. What a bridge. Bombed bridges on the Mekong fare better. The entire surface is ripped apart into foot-wide-or-more relief. A flat and boring design, the side rails are crumbled off in places. Traffic from the other direction is trying to squeeze past us, 10 mph tops. Below us is a surging brown swollen river of Columbia proportions. Wild, untamed in any way, deadly. I wonder how it allows the insult of this bridge to stand, barely as it is.

On the other side, the bridge pavement breaks off to a gaping hole in which the cars and trucks have to skirt with tires up on remaining dirt ridges. I follow the pack, the truck and trailer listing to steep angles one side and another. Kim is quiet, but with eyes as big as fifty cent pieces. Alaskan roads look like park paths to this. Eventually the road tumult quiets down, back to the trashed 40 mph style with hidden *topes*. On and on we go, in traffic fore and aft, for there are a lot of *transmigrantes* traveling along here too. I recognize some of the derelict combinations from the yard. That seems so long ago. Although it is dog-eat-dog out here, I take some comfort in the presence of these other desperate travelers.

The road takes us through a larger town, 30,000 the sign says, another maze of confusion. A red light is noticed and stopped at. Two kids rush the truck, one leaping up on the hood and going into a bucket-and-wipe-window cleaning routine. He is quite adroit, although unasked for. The light changing, I give him a peso, about nothing, which reflects in his disgusted face.

On out of this urban nightmare. A sign points to the Esmeralda Coast, our destination of all desires. On we go, the trailer rasping across every *tope* now. In another thirty miles, an unmarked turnoff to the right, then to the left, made good by observing the beaten path and the convoy of *transmigrantes*. About forty miles to Poza Rica. Two hours of light left. Always the travel terror, the dark. Must get stopped and off the road before dark. Kim reads in the RV camping guide to Mexico about a place on the far side of Poza Rica. Other than a few semi-usable map details, this *bourgeois* and out-of-date piece of crap is designed for massive fortified motor coaches with zillions to spend. We have not seen a single one in all of Mexico. An RV of this type could never make it over these roads, its axles ripped from under it long ago. We are carpetbaggers, our plow on top, the cab stuffed with farm animals.

We feel the lengthening shadows of dark. Four miles to go to the town. We'll make it. A cutoff sign for 127—this is the preferred route to Guatemala where the majority of *transmigrantes* are going. Ahead I see the connecting overpass. Below it is a swarm of police.

There are two lanes and, oddly, I'm in the fast one. A semi lumbers in the right. I adjust my speed to pass the flailing police in the visual lee of the semi. There must be fifty *transmigrantes* pulled over here. A feeding frenzy of pig greed. I can't see any pigs taking notice or pursuit of our rig, so feel kind of clever to have blown by disguised by the semi.

Through the outskirts of ever increasing density, into the town. Finally the warren can be seen thickening into confusion of cement pastel-painted buildings, crumbling and rubbalating out into the edges of the street. Suddenly, there is a check-point. Two police are waving me over. Grudgingly, we stop. Window down. Offer only the transmigration papers. They are extremely excited. Almost yelling at us.

Volation. Infractionie! No alto pesca blither blither.

I gather that they have been in radio contact with the fleece stop under the bridge. They are furious that we blew by. That in itself is a major crime to them.

OK, OK, tickito. I pay. I offer 200 pesos.

No, no! No pesos. Yes, pesos, no dollars.

Must turn around. No passo. Must passo.

Reservations at RV (a lie).

No passo. 200 US dollars.

Holy shit. This is a drubbing. I try to hassle with the bastard a bit more, but he is getting more and more excited. He talks on his radio with enthusiasm for a minute, apparently to the bridge robbery zone. At length, I have to hand over 200 US.

No passo. Must follow back to bridge. Must follow. He leaps into his pig car with the dwarf Igor he has and cranks out into the other lane, stopping traffic with his siren and lights. When he's sure I'm following, he pulls ahead. I am going slug slow. He gets further ahead. Then another pig car pulls up beside him, and like two dogs at play, they crank on all their lights and sirens and speed off.

I crawl. Feeling doomed. I know they will rip us for hundreds if not thousands if I follow to the bridge. I feel myself slipping into catatonia. Going slower and slower. There on our right is this massive new building. A Holiday Inn, Kim says, though there is no sign outside. Not seeing the police ahead of me, I turn slow motion into this and up behind the building where we cannot be seen from the street. It is like the OJ Simpson escape, only without the helicopters. We stop. We are terrified. What to do? What to do?

Night approaching fast. Kim is bitched out to the max. *Let me out! I'm about to burst.* She pisses behind the truck as I look at the back trailer. It is only two inches off the ground, all the *topes* and potholes have broken the main supporting truss—hence is dragging over every thing. Animals are going crazy in the truck. An employee comes over and offers consolation. Why don't we stay in the hotel. It is brand new and only a mil a night. One thousand pesos. About a hundred bucks. Kim goes to get her brush and wipes from her bag in the hover. It is gone. Stolen by the window washer gang.

Now she is insane furious. *Charliee! It's getting fucking dark. Do something. Let's get the fuck on.*

Can't go on. Trailers broken. Pigs are waiting for me. Can't go back into town, another dozen pig traps there. Trapped here. What to do? What to do?

Charlieee! Do something. Fix the fucking trailer then. This is no small task, but it's something to focus on. The pigs can't figure where I've disappeared to, nor would they bring their fetid carcasses near this luxury hotel. I can barely move with the pig horror hanging over

me. I feel like I'm on the green mile, walking to the execution station. Each step smaller than the last, to prolong life, even if in shock.

Charlieeee! What the fuck are you doing? Thinking. Thinking. It is true, a hundred scenarios surge in a kaleidoscope in my mind, none taking any form. The trailer junction is mangled. The puny bolts I welded in before are crumpled up, like fixing a bridge with toothpicks. I need iron. Big iron. Where is it? Pull apart the fence. Can't. Tight. Management standing around. Use some garden tools in the truck. Buried. Wrong size. Need cutting. No way to cut.

CHARRRRRLIEEEeee!

Hey, wait. Here's part of the hover trailer, the brackets for the ramp. Made by the criminal Ernie so long ago. Over-built. Big iron. Rapidly I unbolt one of these. I can make it fit. Make it work. Get out the jack. Jack up the trailer tongue. Tires swivel and the thing crashes to the ground, avoiding killing me by an inch. There is a 42% preference for this option. I jam two chain hoists behind the tires and get it jacked up again. It is hotter than five hells. Sweat is pouring off me in buckets. My pants are soaked, I can't see, the dark is upon us.

The hotel management is standing all around. Wants to know how long this will take. Fifteen minutes, I say. *Bullshit*, cries Kim, *a fucking hour*. The management confers. I make some indication that we might stay at the hotel. They have 98.7% vacancy. Then I ignore them. Turn the truck around so it is facing the trailer hitch. Bonk the hood thirty times till it pops loose. Open hood. Hook up jumper cable to ground and to positive on the hover battery, which I've also pulled. Break open the kit. Hook the leads of the welder to the pos and neg of the system, clamp the Ernie iron in place, and start welding.

The management comes closer in total awe. Lighting has just been produced out of a box, from nothing. Where is the machine? What is this wizardry? The iron fits nice and I slob massive weld on it wherever I can get to it. The metal sizzles as my gushing sweat pours onto it. It is black dark. Finally I'm satisfied and the hover battery is drained flat. Reverse all operations, putting everything away. Turn the truck around and try to communicate how to get the trailer on the ball, in the dark, unable to see each other and unable to relate due to the pissed-off-factor-400.

Then the cat escapes. Panic extra. Calling calling. I see a tail disappear around a cement wall and try to sneak up on it. Kim screams at me for "chasing" the cat. Somehow she cuts the fur blur off and captures it just as its going over a fence into never-never land. Finally get the trailer hooked back up. Now what? What to do? What to do? Can't drive off there in the dark, into the seething pig trap two miles down the road. The hotel does not let animals in. Everyone's fried. I'm basted from welding without a shirt, glazed in eighty layers of sweat. I say we stay the night here. Pay the money. Leave the animals in the truck. What! Unheard of. They'll fry. They'll make it, they're animals. *Fine!* A blackest of silences. We'll leave at 4 a.m., surely they'll be off the road-block in the early morning. *Fine!*

Water is put out on the floor of the truck. The old mean one is let out of her cage, the cat box put on the seat. Who knows where the dog will fit, but who can care. Into the hotel. It is plush. We are filthy. The zillion dollars paid, we are led up to the room. Kim goes catatonic on the couch, pulling a spread over her. No words. There are extra beds, a desk, TV, bar, etc. Luxury. Wrong place, wrong time. I can feel the tendrils of the illegal law out there waiting for me. Excited to jail my ass as a hostage for every dime, for no crime. If ever-impending doom has ever lain one's a neck on a chopping block, this is it. I know my number is up. I can't



understand why Kim is gone into hyper-bitch mode. Why is she not comforting my soon-to-be-incarcerated ass? Her fate hangs tenuously also.

I clean up. The bath is an elaborate affair. I clean thoroughly, nails, teeth, all the usual neglected parts. I lay out my best clothes. It is as if I'm preparing for my own casket viewing. Everything impeccable. Then I go down to the office. Get the number for the American consulate, even though in DC, but maybe some help. I change out another 200 to pesos so there is some additional bribe money.

Back at the room, Kim is still frozen in the fetal position on the couch. I make notes of who to call, stash money in various places, set the alarm clock for 4 a.m., and set to a fitful almost sleepless night of worry and brain torture. This unreal calm, soon to be a memory of last freedom. This night and day of hell forever brain-damaging me. Fear stabs me in sharp pain, like a spear in the chest. It is midnight.

Trapped

The tinkling of the travel alarm clock wakens me so soon, tears me from ogres and demons who fillet me in the dark. I am about 4% rested, which is to say, not at all. Kim is roused, glaring at me from the couch. I gather the few bags and announce we're leaving. I can tell she doesn't really understand what's happening.

At the truck we remove the stinking cat box, let the dog stretch and piss, then we're off into the black of night. A violation of all the rules, Mexican night driving. What's to keep from running into animals and people now? Nobody has blinky bling or reflective clothing, only dark and sordid rags blending with the night. Not another car on the road, what was a half a dozen hours ago a compaction of compacts. On we go, driving modestly. The idea is to get on the cutoff under the bridge and head out the Guatemala way, at some point circling back toward the coast.

Quite quickly we reach the bridge. There is no way to turn left excepting that dirt road that might have connected to the right. Too late, past that. On the other side of the road are still four police cars, all their lights flashing, a dozen *transmigrantes* pulled over. I plow on by, steady, unwavering. This is the trap of death. The highway is separated here and there are no bandits working our side. On I go, checking the mirrors every few second for signs of pursuit. There is none. Thank God in Himmel, I have made it past the incarceration station.

On we go in the black. Slamming into unseen potholes. Pass the town of Hernandez, no blockade here either. I figure now to backtrack to an intersection thirty miles north and head west toward Mexico City. Eventually this will connect south to a toll road that cuts across the southern state of Chiapas and the flooded zones of Villa Hermosa. In another few miles, a massive vibration starts up back in the trailer. Reminds me of a flat, but what can I do, narrow black road, no shoulder, all outlaw land. I must go on. Presently Kim speaks, somewhat pleasantly. *Oh, but don't you hear that screeching of metal back behind us. Yes, I do, but I choose to ignore it. Nothing to be done about it. No matter, what is the worst?* On and on we go, nerves further abraded on the ends of the numb ones. Hands clutched tight to the wheel, curves and hills and holes bashing mercilessly.

Finally, a gas station. A Mexican state-owned Permex. Light. Flat. Sanctuary. I pull in and around to the back. Without the roar of the road, it is plainly obvious iron is dragging on the road. In the back, where the gas station is still under construction, I stop. Get out and look

at what's going on back there. The tire on one side is gone. We have been driving on the rim for the last ten miles. The rim is mashed into an octagonal shape, not a trace of rubber anywhere. The weight and loss of tire elevation has dropped the front of the trailer to the ground. It is worn away in a wedge shape, along with the bottom three inches of trailer jack. A spare tire used to be bolted under the trailer, but it too is gone. Ripped away from the frame by the great road dragging. Only its holding bolt remains. To the casual observer, the trailer is destroyed.

There is a casual observer, a diesel pump man. Nice enough fellow, although we cannot communicate worth spit. *Necesito mecánico*. No shit. This I get. He indicates somehow there may be hope. He calls someone on the cell phone. We gesticulate some more, of which he's not too interested in doing, then wanders off. A hot rain sets in. Kim and I sit next to the diesel pump, under the light, out of the deluge, smoking, smoking, and watching the three-inch cockroaches scurry about.

It can't get any worse than this, can it, Babe? Kim ventures to say. Though grimly true, her brief words are comforting. Nothing to do now but wait. Wait for what . . . unknown.

Thankful now for the things that didn't happen. The police didn't drag me away (though I still fear they will find me), the trailer didn't flip and mash the hover into particles, all the animals are still with us even though frantic to get out of their kennel and, now, the enduring machinery of our globe slowly rotates us back to face the sun. In the grey of dawn, a well-dressed Spaniard and his daughter (?) come to talk to us. He is the *mecánico*. We can communicate little, but the situation is obvious. We need two wheels. There is much hand shaking, and blubbering *gracias* from us, and then they depart.

What now? Waiting is the only option. Around 8, a team of twenty *constructos* show up to work on the gas station. I have to put the thrashed rim back on the trailer and move the thing to the other side of the lot. It is hot again, as always, and we turn the truck on and off to cool the interior roasting creatures. We haven't eaten anything in days, just some chips, bottles of water, and colas. There is no food here either, just some more chips.

I have a few minor inspirations. One is to buy a map and figure out not only where we are, but how to get out of here should occasion arise. The other is to charge the hover battery off the truck for future disasters. It turns out we are twenty miles north of Poza Rica in a town called Alamo. The local map is much more detailed than anything we've previously seen. This is highly encouraging. Even more encouraging is what appears to be a small freeway, a toll road, completely bypassing Poza Rica to the west, although the actual connection to it is unclear. If we can get on this, we can wiz around the bandits. The police do not work the toll roads, that being the territory of some greater more powerful mafia.

Around 9:30 we are basting in the truck, dozing fitfully, watching the *constructos* mix cement in their way. It is a group effort of a half a dozen piling the materials on the ground, adding water, and all stirring and flipping the stuff until the proper consistency is attained. Then it is shoveled into buckets and packed over to the wall or whatever they are making, where others fuss over the placement. I discuss ditching the hover and trailer here. Going on. Or unhooking and going into Mexico City for the wheels. Neither is a great idea. Bad ideas actually.

Suddenly there is a knock on the window. Outside is a twenty-something stocky fellow with a greasy torn T-shirt.

El mecánico? I venture.

Si, si.

We look over the damage while talking in gibberish to each other, neither understanding the other.

Dos rutas? Can do?

Jabber jabber, si.

14-inch rims? El Datsun rutas.

He seems to understand this. I write the number 14 down and he is also understands this. I want to make sure we get both the tire and rim, and draw pictures accordingly. He gets it. Two. *Dos*.

Mil con dos cintos. One thousand two hundred pesos. Each. I make that I understand. I offer him the mangled rim, so that the bolt holes will line up.

No necesito. He taps his head, indicating that all the information is up there.

How long? Quanta hora? There is some confusion about that, but he leads me to believe he'll be right back. OK. He's not asking for any money up front. I thank him profusely, and he jumps in his little wreck of a car missing a door and tears off. Well . . . that was hopeful. What will happen now, anybody's guess. We return to the truck cab and the analysis of the map. Wait.

In less than a half an hour, he is back. Back with two brand new tires of the right size on Datsun rims. I am agog. This is some kind of roadside miracle. I jack up the trailer and he adroitly installs one of the new tires and rim, under the precariously jack-balanced trailer that can fall and mash him at any moment. Seems like fairly common practice for him. The rims are newly spray painted black. I'm wondering if there is some other fella's mini truck sitting amputated in the mud somewhere, the back tires jerked off. But, like I could give a shit, I got mine.

I try to give him US hundred dollar bills, but he looks so forlorn as he fingers them. Banks are foreign to him, and not likely friendly. There is nowhere the money can be changed. I have all the bribe money I changed at the hotel and dig all that out. I pay him 2500 pesos. He points out the hundred-peso overpayment, but I let him know it is for *bueno* service. He lights up entirely. This guy is a great Mexican. With some further handshakes, he dashes off again.

Now here we are . . . fixed. Hardly even 10 a.m. I can't believe it. We can go on with all our crap. I'm a little in shock to have gotten out of that one. Ok, some final tie down and we're off, back in the direction of Poza Rica, but not all the way to the trap. At the first cutoff into the town of Hernandez, we turn into the town. Narrow streets, rutted and broken, starved dogs everywhere, people everywhere.

A quarter mile in, there is a white-shirted policeman, waving us over. Show him the *transmigrantes* paperwork. He's not really interested. He's all about an infraction, *ticketito*. For what?

Driving off the state highway.

OK, sure. One hundred pesos.

He is insulted. *Three hundred.*

I can tell he's not really into it. A glimmer of pity for us seems to have him somewhat hesitant, non-committal. He is not in a cash frenzy like the others.

I open my wallet, showing all. *I have 220 pesos*. I pull it all out and shove it at him. *Toto. Es toto. (it is all).*

No no, tres cintos.

No, no toto. We are poor, I say, robbed, *suffering*. Some of this comes across. I sympathize

with him that he cannot rob us of more. Finally, he accepts it and we part friends. *Passo*. His side-kick behind him scowls. They all seem to have some Igor in training. We are instructed to go down to the end of the street, get on the side highway, and return at the main highway at the end of town. We pass another group of police, loitering for a fleecing, but are ignored because their confederate has just nailed us up the street. Robber etiquette.

Get to the back highway. Proceed to the main. No. No. This will not do. This leads to the nest. I won't go there. I U-turn the rig and head back up the highway in the back of town. It is out of sight of the police pods. On through the back of town, then the road climbs. Up out of town, climbing to the top of a major hill. Some indecision here of what to do, but after a pause, we continue. The other option is unpalatable. Now winding along to the northeast along a lane-and-a-half wide road. People with carts, herds of goats, old men hobbling along.

On we go, winding through green farms, going slowly, going into the unknown. It is not on the map. After a half an hour of this, we go under a freeway. Cars race overhead. Wahooo! We found it. Although no way to get up on it. We continue on for another ten miles, hoping we will not come to the medium-sized town somewhere at the end of this. At long last there is an entrance ramp to get on, but in the wrong direction. In a mile there is a *retorno*, a place where we can cross over the freeway and get going in the other direction. This sure as hell wasn't in the woodchuck guide.

Now we're in the clear. *At last*. In an hour we are well past the cursed Poza Rica area. Safe. Safe from *that* horror at any rate. Eventually the road ends in a toll booth. We have to scrounge coins to find enough pesos for this. What happens if you don't have enough pesos? Do you have to go back? Just past this is a sign to the Esmeralda Coasta. Take the left. Sort of corresponds to the map in a general way.

There is a checkpoint. A multitude all dressed in black. Many with masks on. Of course we're waved over. I feel shock coming on again. The extra mean guy comes over. Hand him our *transmigrante* papers. *No habla espanole*, we explain. He has a glimmer of kindness in him. He is not the local police, but the *Federales*, the government police. We are nothing. Carpetbaggers. Of no interest to them. They are looking for revolutionaries now, the Chiapas Resistance. We totally don't fit the bill. He looks through the papers, then politely hands them back, and waves us on. Incredible.

We come to a larger town. We're out of pesos, again. Need pesos. No, the gas station won't change them funny-looking dollars. Have to go to the *banko*. Where the hell is that? A vague wave down into town. OK. I drive the truck and trailer down into the narrow streets, looking for the bank. It is extremely dense. We pass a policeman who waves for us to pull over. Don't think so. Nowhere to pull over. Traffic on the front and back. I drive just a few miles per hour faster than the pig can catch us walking. He walks after us for a few blocks, where we turn a corner, and disappear deeper into the warren.

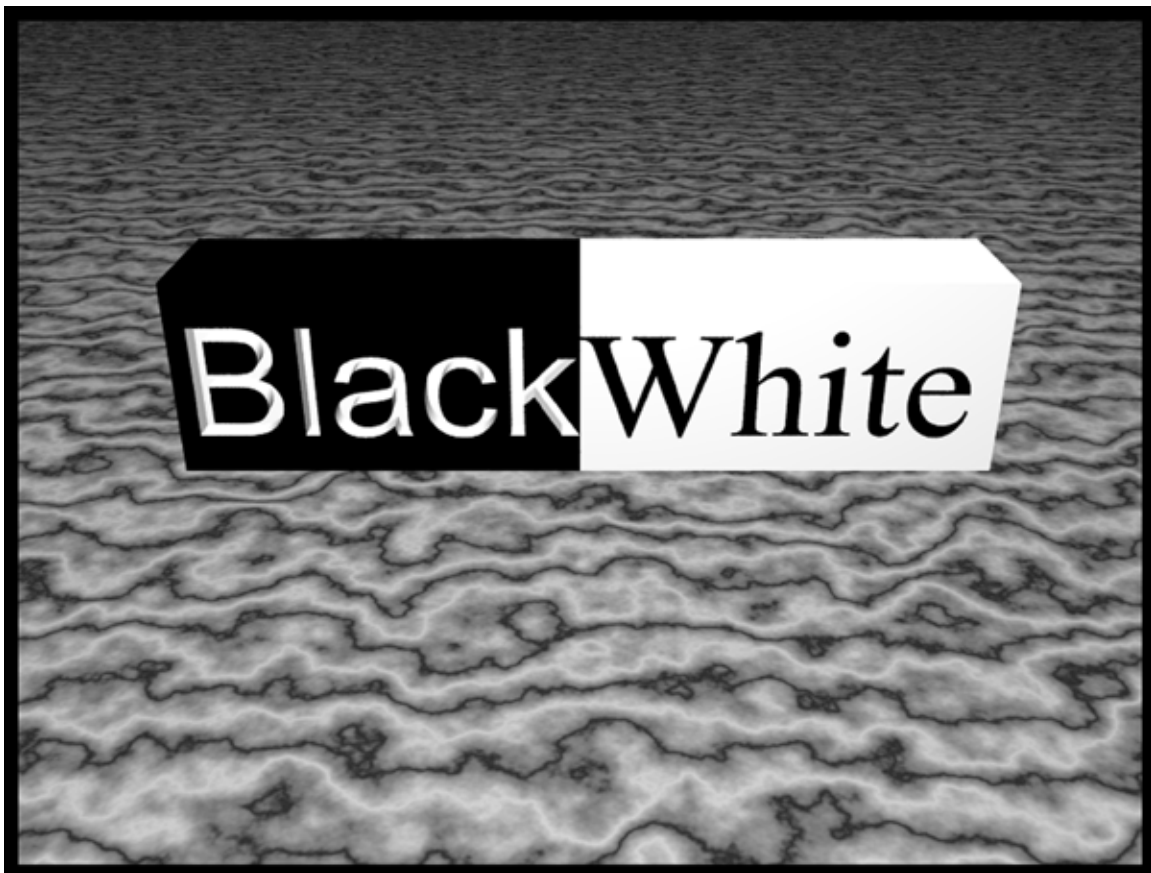
There are a few banks. I park the huge rig half-assed partway in the street, then jump out and go back to the banks. I try all three, but none will change the money. Some gibberish about *politica* something. A bank that won't change money? Assholes all. Three of 'em.

OK, got to get the hell out of here and avoid the walking pig. I take a left down an alley and start out into a cross-street. Screech, smoke, my brakes dynamited, A huge van ground to a halt in front of me. A one-inch near collision with a maniac barreling down the cross street. No signs, stop, one way, right of way, nothing. How the fuck was I to know? Pissed off but unblemished, the maniac van tears on. Another twenty cars barrel past at 40 in the one-lane,

pedestrian-packed street. Eventually I inch out, get down a few streets and find the lane out of the mess back to the highway. OK. New rule. No more entering towns. Fuck towns. If we need to go in, we'll park somewhere outside and walk in. We avoided the walking pig.

To be continued in Cenacle | 80 | December 2011

* * * * *



Paul Finch





The Brotherhood of the Squanicook

I hadn't fished since high school—
four decades and many trips ago.
Then Jake and I would hook hornpout,
sucker and eel out of the Shawsheen,
wrestle bull carp from the Merrimack.
Hornpout and sucker we'd throw back,
father and I fried and ate the eels,
carp sold for gefilte fish up on the hill.

Today we don't fish those waters—
though forever they tincture our blood.
But today Squanicook trout just won't be lured out,
so now we don't fish at all—
just sit in the river on small green boulders,
water sweeping over our shoulders,
eternity's plunge through the rapids
striking deep in our river-cooled bones.

Anything we could say about the eons before and after
this river this planet these life forms
would probably be true yet not vast enough.
So in silence, two brothers, we sit and rest,
awash in just impermanence.

* * *

Nocturnal Instruction

In a dream a skunk approaches,
milling about suspiciously,
and I sense it could rear and spray in an instant,
so I kick out, get it to face me
and not turn away, and I keep the heat on,
not letting the skunk be unkind to me,
nor I harmful to it.
I don't aim for its body,
just charge the air before it
with a presence that says,
"Look, buddy, I won't violate your space,
so don't even think of violating mine."
Sometimes you've got to kick a little
to keep the varmints away.

* * *

A Benediction

May your path become more vibrant,
and the prayers to enhance
your precision and grace
take hold with the morning light.
May your service refine and multiply,
and the smallest act in the hardest hour
brim with gratitude and peace.

Such are the blessings that crowd
the mind of a wayfarer,
such are the signs just revealed
in the swoop of a hawk,
the remembrance of a lover.

May the ache of being flood your senses,
and puffs of mild September air
metastasize in your bloodstream.
May your ego fracture and dissolve,
and the billion and one years locked in the rocks
be the clock that governs time.

And so go the days and the nights
and the worlds without name or endings,
so goes the work and the play
and the power of a vision to raise you.

* * * * *



Ralph Waldo Emerson



The Transcendentalist

[Classic Essay]

[A lecture read at the Masonic Temple,
Boston, Massachusetts, January 1842]

The first thing we have to say respecting what are called *new views* here in New England, at the present time, is, that they are not new, but the very oldest of thoughts cast into the mold of these new times. The light is always identical in its composition, but it falls on a great variety of objects, and by so falling is first revealed to us, not in its own form, for it is formless, but in theirs; in like manner, thought only appears in the objects it classifies. What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism; Idealism as it appears in 1842. As thinkers, mankind have ever divided into two sects, Materialists and Idealists; the first class founding on experience, the second on consciousness; the first class beginning to think from the data of the senses, the second class perceive that the senses are not final, and say, the senses give us representations of things, but what are the things themselves, they cannot tell. The materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances, and the animal wants of man; the idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture. These two modes of thinking are both natural, but the idealist contends that his way of thinking is in higher nature. He concedes all that the other affirms, admits the impressions of sense, admits their coherency, their use and beauty, and then asks the materialist for his grounds of assurance that things are as his senses represent them. But I, he says, affirm facts not affected by the illusions of sense, facts which are of the same nature as the faculty which reports them, and not liable to doubt; facts which in their first appearance to us assume a native superiority to material facts, degrading these into a language by which the first are to be spoken; facts which it only needs a retirement from the senses to discern. Every materialist will be an idealist; but an idealist can never go backward to be a materialist. The idealist, in speaking of events, sees them as spirits. He does not deny the sensuous fact: by no means; but he will not see that alone. He does not deny the presence of this table, this chair, and the walls of this room, but he looks at these things as the reverse side of the tapestry, as the *other end*, each being a sequel or completion of a spiritual fact which nearly concerns him. This manner of looking at things, transfers every object in nature from an independent and anomalous position without there, into the consciousness. Even the materialist Condillac, perhaps the most logical expounder of materialism, was constrained to say, "Though we should soar into the heavens, though we should sink into the abyss, we never go out of ourselves; it is always our own thought that we perceive." What more could an idealist say?

The materialist, secure in the certainty of sensation, mocks at fine-spun theories, at star-gazers and dreamers, and believes that his life is solid, that he at least takes nothing for granted, but knows where he stands, and what he does. Yet how easy it is to show him, that he also is a phantom walking and working amid phantoms, and that he need only ask a question

or two beyond his daily questions, to find his solid universe growing dim and impalpable before his sense. The sturdy capitalist, no matter how deep and square on blocks of Quincy granite he lays the foundations of his banking-house or Exchange, must set it, at last, not on a cube corresponding to the angles of his structure, but on a mass of unknown materials and solidity, red-hot or white-hot, perhaps at the core, which rounds off to an almost perfect sphericity, and lies floating in soft air, and goes spinning away, dragging bank and banker with it at a rate of thousands of miles the hour, he knows not whither, — a bit of bullet, now glimmering, now darkling through a small cubic space on the edge of an unimaginable pit of emptiness. And this wild balloon, in which his whole venture is embarked, is a just symbol of his whole state and faculty. One thing, at least, he says is certain, and does not give me the headache, that figures do not lie; the multiplication table has been hitherto found unimpeachable truth; and, moreover, if I put a gold eagle in my safe, I find it again to-morrow; — but for these thoughts, I know not whence they are. They change and pass away. But ask him why he believes that an uniform experience will continue uniform, or on what grounds he founds his faith in his figures, and he will perceive that his mental fabric is built up on just as strange and quaking foundations as his proud edifice of stone.

In the order of thought, the materialist takes his departure from the external world, and esteems a man as one product of that. The idealist takes his departure from his consciousness, and reckons the world an appearance. The materialist respects sensible masses, Society, Government, social art, and luxury, every establishment, every mass, whether majority of numbers, or extent of space, or amount of objects, every social action. The idealist has another measure, which is metaphysical, namely, the *rank* which things themselves take in his consciousness; not at all, the size or appearance. Mind is the only reality, of which men and all other natures are better or worse reflectors. Nature, literature, history, are only subjective phenomena. Although in his action overpowered by the laws of action, and so, warmly cooperating with men, even preferring them to himself, yet when he speaks scientifically, or after the order of thought, he is constrained to degrade persons into representatives of truths. He does not respect labor, or the products of labor, namely, property, otherwise than as a manifold symbol, illustrating with wonderful fidelity of details the laws of being; he does not respect government, except as far as it reiterates the law of his mind; nor the church; nor charities; nor arts, for themselves; but hears, as at a vast distance, what they say, as if his consciousness would speak to him through a pantomimic scene. His thought, — that is the Universe. His experience inclines him to behold the procession of facts you call the world, as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded center in himself, center alike of him and of them, and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence, relative to that aforesaid Unknown Centre of him.

From this transfer of the world into the consciousness, this beholding of all things in the mind, follow easily his whole ethics. It is simpler to be self-dependent. The height, the deity of man is, to be self-sustained, to need no gift, no foreign force. Society is good when it does not violate me; but best when it is likeliest to solitude. Everything real is self-existent. Everything divine shares the self-existence of Deity. All that you call the world is the shadow of that substance which you are, the perpetual creation of the powers of thought, of those that are dependent and of those that are independent of your will. Do not cumber yourself with fruitless pains to mend and remedy remote effects; let the soul be erect, and all things will go well. You think me the child of my circumstances: I make my circumstance. Let any thought or

motive of mine be different from that they are, the difference will transform my condition and economy. I — this thought which is called I, — is the mould into which the world is poured like melted wax. The mold is invisible, but the world betrays the shape of the mold. You call it the power of circumstance, but it is the power of me. Am I in harmony with myself? my position will seem to you just and commanding. Am I vicious and insane? my fortunes will seem to you obscure and descending. As I am, so shall I associate, and, so shall I act; Caesar's history will paint out Caesar. Jesus acted so, because he thought so. I do not wish to overlook or to gainsay any reality; I say, I make my circumstance: but if you ask me, Whence am I? I feel like other men my relation to that Fact which cannot be spoken, or defined, nor even thought, but which exists, and will exist.

The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine. He believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration, and in ecstasy. He wishes that the spiritual principle should be suffered to demonstrate itself to the end, in all possible applications to the state of man, without the admission of anything unspiritual; that is, anything positive, dogmatic, personal. Thus, the spiritual measure of inspiration is the depth of the thought, and never, who said it? And so he resists all attempts to palm other rules and measures on the spirit than its own. In action, he easily incurs the charge of antinomianism by his avowal that he, who has the Lawgiver, may with safety not only neglect, but even contravene every written commandment. In the play of *Othello*, the expiring Desdemona absolves her husband of the murder, to her attendant Emilia. Afterwards, when Emilia charges him with the crime, Othello exclaims, "You heard her say herself it was not I." Emilia replies, "The more angel she, and thou the blacker devil." Of this fine incident, Jacobi, the Transcendental moralist, makes use, with other parallel instances, in his reply to Fichte. Jacobi, refusing all measure of right and wrong except the determinations of the private spirit, remarks that there is no crime but has sometimes been a virtue. "I," he says, "am that atheist, that godless person who, in opposition to an imaginary doctrine of calculation, would lie as the dying Desdemona lied; would lie and deceive, as Pylades when he personated Orestes; would assassinate like Timoleon; would perjure myself like Epaminondas, and John de Witt; I would resolve on suicide like Cato; I would commit sacrilege with David; yea, and pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath, for no other reason than that I was fainting for lack of food. For, I have assurance in myself, that, in pardoning these faults according to the letter, man exerts the sovereign right which the majesty of his being confers on him; he sets the seal of his divine nature to the grace he accords."

In like manner, if there is anything grand and daring in human thought or virtue, any reliance on the vast, the unknown; any presentiment; any extravagance of faith, the spiritualist adopts it as most in nature. The oriental mind has always tended to this largeness. Buddhism is an expression of it. The Buddhist who thanks no man, who says, "do not flatter your benefactors," but who, in his conviction that every good deed can by no possibility escape its reward, will not deceive the benefactor by pretending that he has done more than he should, is a Transcendentalist. You will see by this sketch that there is no such thing as a Transcendental party; that there is no pure Transcendentalist; that we know of none but prophets and heralds of such a philosophy; that all who by strong bias of nature have leaned to the spiritual side in doctrine, have stopped short of their goal. We have had many harbingers and fore-runners; but of a purely spiritual life, history has afforded no example. I mean, we have yet no man who has leaned entirely on his character, and eaten angels' food; who, trusting to his sentiments,

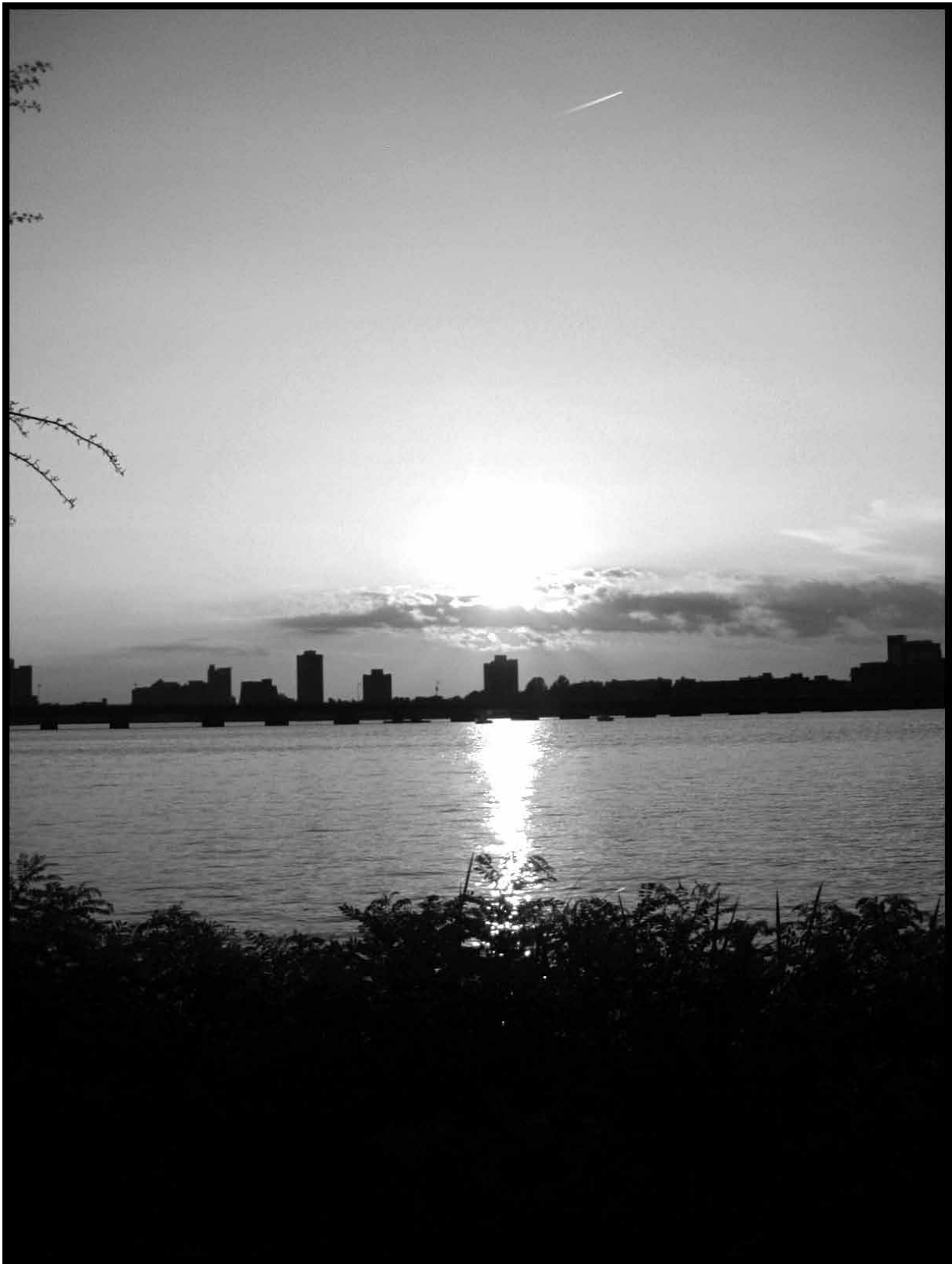
found life made of miracles; who, working for universal aims, found himself fed, he knew not how; clothed, sheltered, and weaponed, he knew not how, and yet it was done by his own hands. Only in the instinct of the lower animals, we find the suggestion of the methods of it, and something higher than our understanding. The squirrel hoards nuts, and the bee gathers honey, without knowing what they do, and they are thus provided for without selfishness or disgrace.

Shall we say, then, that Transcendentalism is the Saturnalia or excess of Faith; the presentiment of a faith proper to man in his integrity, excessive only when his imperfect obedience hinders the satisfaction of his wish. Nature is transcendental, exists primarily, necessarily, ever works and advances, yet takes no thought for the morrow. Man owns the dignity of the life which throbs around him in chemistry, and tree, and animal, and in the involuntary functions of his own body; yet he is balked when he tries to fling himself into this enchanted circle, where all is done without degradation. Yet genius and virtue predict in man the same absence of private ends, and of condescension to circumstances, united with every trait and talent of beauty and power.

This way of thinking, falling on Roman times, made Stoic philosophers; falling on despotic times, made patriot Catos and Brutuses; falling on superstitious times, made prophets and apostles; on popish times, made protestants and ascetic monks, preachers of Faith against the preachers of Works; on prelatical times, made Puritans and Quakers; and falling on Unitarian and commercial times, makes the peculiar shades of Idealism which we know. It is well known to most of my audience, that the Idealism of the present day acquired the name of Transcendental, from the use of that term by Immanuel Kant, of Konigsberg, who replied to the skeptical philosophy of Locke, which insisted that there was nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the experience of the senses, by showing that there was a very important class of ideas, or imperative forms, which did not come by experience, but through which experience was acquired; that these were intuitions of the mind itself; and he denominated them *Transcendental* forms. The extra-ordinary profoundness and precision of that man's thinking have given vogue to his nomenclature, in Europe and America, to that extent, that whatever belongs to the class of intuitive thought, is popularly called at the present day *Transcendental*. Although, as we have said, there is no pure Transcendentalist, yet the tendency to respect the intuitions, and to give them, at least in our creed, all authority over our experience, has deeply colored the conversation and poetry of the present day; and the history of genius and of religion in these times, though impure, and as yet not incarnated in any powerful individual, will be the history of this tendency.

It is a sign of our times, conspicuous to the coarsest observer, that many intelligent and religious persons withdraw themselves from the common labors and competitions of the market and the caucus, and betake themselves to a certain solitary and critical way of living, from which no solid fruit has yet appeared to justify their separation. They hold themselves aloof: they feel the disproportion between their faculties and the work offered them, and they prefer to ramble in the country and perish of ennui, to the degradation of such charities and such ambitions as the city can propose to them. They are striking work, and crying out for somewhat worthy to do! What they do, is done only because they are over-powered by the humanities that speak on all sides; and they consent to such labor as is open to them, though to their lofty dream the writing of *Iliads* or *Hamlets*, or the building of cities or empires seems drudgery.

Now every one must do after his kind, be he asp or angel, and these must. The question, which a wise man and a student of modern history will ask, is, what that kind is? And truly, as in ecclesiastical history we take so much pains to know what the Gnostics, what the Essenes, what the Manichees, and what the Reformers believed, it would not misbecome us to inquire nearer home, what these companions and contemporaries of ours think and do, at least so far as these thoughts and actions appear to be not accidental and personal, but common to many, and the inevitable flower of the Tree of Time. Our American literature and spiritual history are, we confess, in the optative mood; but whoso knows these seething brains, these admirable radicals, these unsocial worshippers, these talkers who talk the sun and moon away, will believe that this heresy cannot pass away without leaving its mark. They are lonely; the spirit of their writing and conversation is lonely; they repel influences; they shun general society; they incline to shut themselves in their chamber in the house, to live in the country rather than in the town, and to find their tasks and amusements in solitude. Society, to be sure, does not like this very well; it saith, Whoso goes to walk alone, accuses the whole world; he declareth all to be unfit to be his companions; it is very uncivil, nay, insulting; Society will retaliate. Meantime, this retirement does not proceed from any whim on the part of these separators; but if any one will take pains to talk with them, he will find that this part is chosen both from temperament and from principle; with some unwillingness, too, and as a choice of the less of two evils; for these persons are not by nature melancholy, sour, and unsocial, — they are not stockish or brute, — but joyous; susceptible, affectionate; they have even more than others a great wish to be loved. Like the young Mozart, they are rather ready to cry ten times a day, “But are you sure you love me?” Nay, if they tell you their whole thought, they will own that love seems to them the last and highest gift of nature; that there are persons whom in their hearts they daily thank for existing, — persons whose faces are perhaps unknown to them, but whose fame and spirit have penetrated their solitude, — and for whose sake they wish to exist. To behold the beauty of another character, which inspires a new interest in our own; to behold the beauty lodged in a human being, with such vivacity of apprehension, that I am instantly forced home to inquire if I am not deformity itself: to behold in another the expression of a love so high that it assures itself, — assures itself also to me against every possible casualty except my unworthiness; — these are degrees on the scale of human happiness, to which they have ascended; and it is a fidelity to this sentiment which has made common association distasteful to them. They wish a just and even fellowship, or none. They cannot gossip with you, and they do not wish, as they are sincere and religious, to gratify any mere curiosity which you may entertain. Like fairies, they do not wish to be spoken of. Love me, they say, but do not ask who is my cousin and my uncle. If you do not need to hear my thought, because you can read it in my face and behavior, then I will tell it you from sunrise to sunset. If you cannot divine it, you would not understand what I say. I will not molest myself for you. I do not wish to be profaned. And yet, it seems as if this loneliness, and not this love, would prevail in their circumstances, because of the extravagant demand they make on human nature. That, indeed, constitutes a new feature in their portrait, that they are the most exacting and extortionate critics. Their quarrel with every man they meet, is not with his kind, but with his degree. There is not enough of him, — that is the only fault. They prolong their privilege of childhood in this wise, of doing nothing, — but making immense demands on all the gladiators in the lists of action and fame. They make us feel the strange disappointment which overcasts every human youth. So many promising youths, and never a finished man! The profound nature will have a savage rudeness; the delicate



one will be shallow, or the victim of sensibility; the richly accomplished will have some capital absurdity; and so every piece has a crack. 'Tis strange, but this masterpiece is a result of such an extreme delicacy, that the most unobserved flaw in the boy will neutralize the most aspiring genius, and spoil the work. Talk with a seaman of the hazards to life in his profession, and he will ask you, "Where are the old sailors? do you not see that all are young men?" And we, on this sea of human thought, in like manner inquire, Where are the old idealists? where are they who represented to the last generation that extravagant hope, which a few happy aspirants suggest to ours? In looking at the class of counsel, and power, and wealth, and at the matronage of the land, amidst all the prudence and all the triviality, one asks, Where are they who represented genius, virtue, the invisible and heavenly world, to these? Are they dead, — taken in early ripeness to the gods, — as ancient wisdom foretold their fate? Or did the high idea die out of them, and leave their unperfumed body as its tomb and tablet, announcing to all that the celestial inhabitant, who once gave them beauty, had departed? Will it be better with the new generation? We easily predict a fair future to each new candidate who enters the lists, but we are frivolous and volatile, and by low aims and ill example do what we can to defeat this hope. Then these youths bring us a rough but effectual aid. By their unconcealed dissatisfaction, they expose our poverty, and the insignificance of man to man. A man is a poor liminary benefactor. He ought to be a shower of benefits — a great influence, which should never let his brother go, but should refresh old merits continually with new ones; so that, though absent, he should never be out of my mind, his name never far from my lips; but if the earth should open at my side, or my last hour were come, his name should be the prayer I should utter to the Universe. But in our experience, man is cheap, and friendship wants its deep sense. We affect to dwell with our friends in their absence, but we do not; when deed, word, or letter comes not, they let us go. These exacting children advertise us of our wants. There is no compliment, no smooth speech with them; they pay you only this one compliment, of insatiable expectation; they aspire, they severely exact, and if they only stand fast in this watch-tower, and persist in demanding unto the end, and without end, then are they terrible friends, whereof poet and priest cannot choose but stand in awe; and what if they eat clouds, and drink wind, they have not been without service to the race of man.

With this passion for what is great and extraordinary, it cannot be wondered at, that they are repelled by vulgarity and frivolity in people. They say to themselves, It is better to be alone than in bad company. And it is really a wish to be met, — the wish to find society for their hope and religion, — which prompts them to shun what is called society. They feel that they are never so fit for friendship, as when they have quitted mankind, and taken themselves to friend. A picture, a book, a favorite spot in the hills or the woods, which they can people with the fair and worthy creation of the fancy, can give them often forms so vivid, that these for the time shall seem real, and society the illusion. But their solitary and fastidious manners not only withdraw them from the conversation, but from the labors of the world; they are not good citizens, not good members of society; unwillingly they bear their part of the public and private burdens; they do not willingly share in the public charities, in the public religious rites, in the enterprises of education, of missions foreign or domestic, in the abolition of the slave-trade, or in the temperance society. They do not even like to vote. The philanthropists inquire whether Transcendentalism does not mean sloth: they had as lief hear that their friend is dead, as that he is a Transcendentalist; for then is he paralyzed, and can never do anything for humanity. What right, cries the good world, has the man of genius to retreat from work,

and indulge himself? The popular literary creed seems to be, 'I am a sublime genius; I ought not therefore to labor.' But genius is the power to labor better and more availably. Deserve thy genius: exalt it. The good, the illuminated, sit apart from the rest, censuring their dullness and vices, as if they thought that, by sitting very grand in their chairs, the very brokers, attorneys, and congressmen would see the error of their ways, and flock to them. But the good and wise must learn to act, and carry salvation to the combatants and demagogues in the dusty arena below. On the part of these children, it is replied, that life and their faculty seem to them gifts too rich to be squandered on such trifles as you propose to them. What you call your fundamental institutions, your great and holy causes, seem to them great abuses, and, when nearly seen, paltry matters. Each 'Cause,' as it is called, — say Abolition, Temperance, say Calvinism, or Unitarianism, — becomes speedily a little shop, where the article, let it have been at first never so subtle and ethereal, is now made up into portable and convenient cakes, and retailed in small quantities to suit purchasers. You make very free use of these words 'great' and 'holy,' but few things appear to them such. Few persons have any magnificence of nature to inspire enthusiasm, and the philanthropies and charities have a certain air of quackery. As to the general course of living, and the daily employments of men, they cannot see much virtue in these, since they are parts of this vicious circle; and, as no great ends are answered by the men, there is nothing noble in the arts by which they are maintained. Nay, they have made the experiment, and found that, from the liberal professions to the coarsest manual labor, and from the courtesies of the academy and the college to the conventions of the cotillion-room and the morning call, there is a spirit of cowardly compromise and seeming, which intimates a frightful skepticism, a life without love, and an activity without an aim.

Unless the action is necessary, unless it is adequate, I do not wish to perform it. I do not wish to do one thing but once. I do not love routine. Once possessed of the principle, it is equally easy to make four or forty thousand applications of it. A great man will be content to have indicated in any the slightest manner his perception of the reigning Idea of his time, and will leave to those who like it the multiplication of examples. When he has hit the white, the rest may shatter the target. Every thing admonishes us how needlessly long life is. Every moment of a hero so raises and cheers us, that a twelve-month is an age. All that the brave Xanthus brings home from his wars, is the recollection that, at the storming of Samos, "in the heat of the battle, Pericles smiled on me, and passed on to another detachment." It is the quality of the moment, not the number of days, of events, or of actors, that imports. New, we confess, and by no means happy, is our condition: if you want the aid of our labor, we ourselves stand in greater want of the labor. We are miserable with inaction. We perish of rest and rust: but we do not like your work.

'Then,' says the world, 'show me your own.'

'We have none.'

'What will you do, then?' cries the world.

'We will wait.'

'How long?'

'Until the Universe rises up and calls us to work.'

'But whilst you wait, you grow old and useless.'

'Be it so: I can sit in a corner and *perish*, (as you call it,) but I will not move until I have the highest command. If no call should come for years, for centuries, then I know that the want of the Universe is the attestation of faith by my abstinence. Your virtuous projects,

so called, do not cheer me. I know that which shall come will cheer me. If I cannot work, at least I need not lie. All that is clearly due to-day is not to lie. In other places, other men have encountered sharp trials, and have behaved themselves well. The martyrs were sawn asunder, or hung alive on meat-hooks. Cannot we screw our courage to patience and truth, and without complaint, or even with good-humor, await our turn of action in the Infinite Counsels?’

But, to come a little closer to the secret of these persons, we must say, that to them it seems a very easy matter to answer the objections of the man of the world, but not so easy to dispose of the doubts and objections that occur to themselves. They are exercised in their own spirit with queries, which acquaint them with all adversity, and with the trials of the bravest heroes. When I asked them concerning their private experience, they answered somewhat in this wise: It is not to be denied that there must be some wide difference between my faith and other faith; and mine is a certain brief experience, which surprised me in the highway or in the market, in some place, at some time, — whether in the body or out of the body, God knoweth, — and made me aware that I had played the fool with fools all this time, but that law existed for me and for all; that to me belonged trust, a child’s trust and obedience, and the worship of ideas, and I should never be fool more. Well, in the space of an hour, probably, I was let down from this height; I was at my old tricks, the selfish member of a selfish society. My life is superficial, takes no root in the deep world; I ask, When shall I die, and be relieved of the responsibility of seeing an Universe which I do not use? I wish to exchange this flash-of-lightning faith for continuous daylight, this fever-glow for a benign climate. These two states of thought diverge every moment, and stand in wild contrast. To him who looks at his life from these moments of illumination, it will seem that he skulks and plays a mean, shiftless, and subaltern part in the world. That is to be done which he has not skill to do, or to be said which others can say better, and he lies by, or occupies his hands with some plaything, until his hour comes again. Much of our reading, much of our labor, seems mere waiting: it was not that we were born for. Any other could do it as well, or better. So little skill enters into these works, so little do they mix with the divine life, that it really signifies little what we do, whether we turn a grindstone, or ride, or run, or make fortunes, or govern the state. The worst feature of this double consciousness is, that the two lives, of the understanding and of the soul, which we lead, really show very little relation to each other, never meet and measure each other: one prevails now, all buzz and din; and the other prevails then, all infinitude and paradise; and, with the progress of life, the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves. Yet, what is my faith? What am I? What but a thought of serenity and independence, an abode in the deep blue sky? Presently the clouds shut down again; yet we retain the belief that this petty web we weave will at last be overshot and reticulated with veins of the blue, and that the moments will characterize the days. Patience, then, is for us, is it not? Patience, and still patience. When we pass, as presently we shall, into some new infinitude, out of this Iceland of negations, it will please us to reflect that, though we had few virtues or consolations, we bore with our indigence, nor once strove to repair it with hypocrisy or false heat of any kind. But this class are not sufficiently characterized, if we omit to add that they are lovers and worshippers of Beauty. In the eternal trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, each in its perfection including the three, they prefer to make Beauty the sign and head. Something of the same taste is observable in all the moral movements of the time, in the religious and benevolent enterprises. They have a liberal, even an aesthetic spirit. A reference to Beauty in action sounds, to be sure, a little hollow and ridiculous in the ears of the old church. In politics, it has often sufficed, when they

treated of justice, if they kept the bounds of selfish calculation. If they granted restitution, it was prudence which granted it. But the justice which is now claimed for the black, and the pauper, and the drunkard is for Beauty, — is for a necessity to the soul of the agent, not of the beneficiary. I say, this is the tendency, not yet the realization. Our virtue totters and trips, does not yet walk firmly. Its representatives are austere; they preach and denounce; their rectitude is not yet a grace. They are still liable to that slight taint of burlesque which, in our strange world, attaches to the zealot. A saint should be as dear as the apple of the eye. Yet we are tempted to smile, and we flee from the working to the speculative reformer, to escape that same slight ridicule. Alas for these days of derision and criticism! We call the Beautiful the highest, because it appears to us the golden mean, escaping the dowdiness of the good, and the heartlessness of the true. — They are lovers of nature also, and find an indemnity in the inviolable order of the world for the violated order and grace of man.

There is, no doubt, a great deal of well-founded objection to be spoken or felt against the sayings and doings of this class, some of whose traits we have selected; no doubt, they will lay themselves open to criticism and to lampoons, and as ridiculous stories will be told of them as of any. There will be cant and pretension; there will be subtlety and moonshine. These persons are of unequal strength, and do not all prosper. They complain that everything around them must be denied; and if feeble, it takes all their strength to deny, before they can begin to lead their own life. Grave seniors insist on their respect to this institution, and that usage; to an obsolete history; to some vocation, or college, or etiquette, or beneficiary, or charity, or morning or evening call, which they resist, as what does not concern them. But it costs such sleepless nights, alienations and misgivings, — they have so many moods about it; — these old guardians never change *their* minds; they have but one mood on the subject, namely, that Antony is very perverse, — that it is quite as much as Antony can do, to assert his rights, abstain from what he thinks foolish, and keep his temper. He cannot help the reaction of this injustice in his own mind. He is braced-up and stilted; all freedom and flowing genius, all sallies of wit and frolic nature are quite out of the question; it is well if he can keep from lying, injustice, and suicide. This is no time for gaiety and grace. His strength and spirits are wasted in rejection. But the strong spirits overpower those around them without effort. Their thought and emotion comes in like a flood, quite withdraws them from all notice of these carping critics; they surrender themselves with glad heart to the heavenly guide, and only by implication reject the clamorous nonsense of the hour. Grave seniors talk to the deaf, — church and old book mumble and ritualize to an unheeding, preoccupied and advancing mind, and thus they by happiness of greater momentum lose no time, but take the right road at first. But all these of whom I speak are not proficient; they are novices; they only show the road in which man should travel, when the soul has greater health and prowess. Yet let them feel the dignity of their charge, and deserve a larger power. Their heart is the ark in which the fire is concealed, which shall burn in a broader and universal flame. Let them obey the Genius then most when his impulse is wildest; then most when he seems to lead to uninhabitable deserts of thought and life; for the path which the hero travels alone is the highway of health and benefit to mankind. What is the privilege and nobility of our nature, but its persistency, through its power to attach itself to what is permanent?

Society also has its duties in reference to this class, and must behold them with what charity it can. Possibly some benefit may yet accrue from them to the state. In our Mechanics' Fair, there must be not only bridges, ploughs, carpenters' planes, and baking troughs, but also

some few finer instruments, — rain gauges, thermometers, and telescopes; and in society, besides farmers, sailors, and weavers, there must be a few persons of purer fire kept specially as gauges and meters of character; persons of a fine, detecting instinct, who betray the smallest accumulations of wit and feeling in the bystander. Perhaps too there might be room for the excitors and monitors; collectors of the heavenly spark with power to convey the electricity to others. Or, as the storm-tossed vessel at sea speaks the frigate or 'line packet' to learn its longitude, so it may not be without its advantage that we should now and then encounter rare and gifted men, to compare the points of our spiritual compass, and verify our bearings from superior chronometers. Amidst the downward tendency and proneness of things, when every voice is raised for a new road or another statute, or a subscription of stock, for an improvement in dress, or in dentistry, for a new house or a larger business, for a political party, or the division of an estate, — will you not tolerate one or two solitary voices in the land, speaking for thoughts and principles not marketable or perishable? Soon these improvements and mechanical inventions will be superseded; these modes of living lost out of memory; these cities rotted, ruined by war, by new inventions, by new seats of trade, or the geologic changes: — all gone, like the shells which sprinkle the sea beach with a white colony to-day, forever renewed to be forever destroyed. But the thoughts which these few hermits strove to proclaim by silence, as well as by speech, not only by what they did, but by what they forbore to do, shall abide in beauty and strength, to reorganize themselves in nature, to invest themselves anew in other, perhaps higher endowed and happier mixed clay than ours, in fuller union with the surrounding system.

* * * * *





Walter Smith







Judih Haggai

ripples of history
carry me into today
light of morning

* * *

life buzz
baby birds at dawn
who can sleep?

* * *

under the stars
small feet lose balance
as earth shifts

* * *



Canadian loon
brings messages from home
stillness of pond

* * *

optimism morn
with one sip, i shall prevail
fly begone

* * *

all one
blossom promises fragrance
as moon winks to sun

* * *

remember war
hope for peace
still i cannot sleep

* * *

circles become spirals
there are no straight lines
i'm getting older

* * *

try to fight the night
it wins, it lasts ten rounds
maybe tomorrow

* * *

sinking feeling
lifeline appears
grasp the bird's tail

* * *

hunger for more
beyond daily agonies
i rise at dawn

* * *

stop and listen
between songs in my head
quiet hush of daylight

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

There Lingers My Soul: Love for Boston's Museum of Fine Arts

It was nearly 30 years ago that I first walked into the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. I was a college student down in Connecticut, & Boston, though hardly a two-hour drive from me, was a place I little knew & had visited perhaps once as a kid on a school field trip to see a Red Sox game.

Then I began to come regularly on college club outings. Day trips. My greater world began to build from then, from those early explorations, to my years living here in the 1990s, to my stretch out West in Seattle & Portland, & on to returning here with Kassi in 2010.

Some places *fit* a person, just as some people fit, some ideas, & so on. Boston fits me, I knew that even when I lived on the other side of the continent. There, I was, simply explained, "from Boston," & this never changed.

When I returned, the magic I'd felt, & felt diminished over time, returned, renewed. The fit was solid again.

It was the Museum of Fine Arts where I felt that fit very early on, even before Harvard Square & other long-loved places. Over the years I've been to many great museums in many places, admired them all, but none have I loved like the MFA. For me, it's like I live there as often as I can make it home. The way Black Rock City once fit (& will always in its way), the way my dearest loved ones, current & past, fit, so it *fits*.

A few weeks ago, having landed a new job but having a delayed start date, I decided to spend two of my free days at the MFA, live there anew for hours, as I had many other times in past years, explore its expanded offerings including the Art of the Americas wing, take pictures, write poems, exult in being there anew, again, hereon. I walked for hours, getting my feel for what & where sharp again, & eventually I wrote.

The second visit concluded with Kassi & I seeing the excellent Degas and the Nude exhibition, which is running at the MFA through February 5, 2012. For many years I visited the MFA on my own most times. To bring the girl who best fits me to one of my most beloved fitting places is—what else?—*fitting*.

What follows is a portrait in poems & pictures from a happy pair of visits with my old friend. I am glad to say that this issue's *Notes from New England* is about as New Englandly as can be.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, "Dance at Bougival," oil on canvas, 1883

Tis the red scarf brings you to this café,
 it belongs neither to the dancer nor her mate,
 tis the red scarf makes the rest alight,
 for the rest would have forgotten blown away,
 tis the rest scarf you can thank, for the stayed
 hunger of cheek to cheek, hand upon hand,
 dank blue, labial pink, trees, drinkers, this wide world.





Claude Monet, "Grainstack (Sunset)," 1891, oil on canvas

Nomads live behind those wheat stacks,
 the kind that dance at dusk, who kidnap
 little scrawny gypsy girls & raise them up
 for sleek dancing wives. With their wives
 & pipes & strings, their tents & hand-made
 rock knives, they live behind those wheat stacks
 the weeks or months before snow fall,
 sing hungry songs of jiving asses & dangling stars,
 pluck toe-less sprites from deep cattle dung
 to squeeze & fire their dreaming brew,
 rest lidless atop those wheat stacks & laugh
 at the cosmos' descent in sparkles & stones,
 disappear with or before the snows, leaving
 only the tokens of the scarves of the gypsy
 girls mature enough by new year to wed & bed.







Claude Monet, "Water Lilies," 1907, oil on canvas

"What's missing in this canvas," he said,
 "is not the shore nor the sky, as some say,
 nor an appreciative human bias to keep
 matters of nature subordinate to those of men,
nay, what's missing here is the crippling flaw
 of seeing in time" &, when challenged
 to defend & define this ambiguous philosophy,
 he propped his elbows on the hoary, twisted
 frame, pulled his legs up in a diver's crouch,
 & completed a splashless fall within.

Washington Allston, "Moonlight, 1819," oil on canvas

It was as he'd read to me a year before,
 in the book we'd had to burn, mail its ashes
 to the horseman now before us in the great moonlight.
 The boat was pulled ashore, its sail drooping in
 readiness. We'd brought the child as agreed.
 He might come one day too. I chanced one look
 around, this was a beautiful place with its far
 mountains & verdant woods. Yet I didn't love it,
 didn't love anywhere, or myself, or my close companion.
 We were bound now to places where want & hunger
 & the need to dress for a lover that he may, pleased,
 undress you again, none of these existed, &
 my only doubt was twined of the boy's damp hand
 releasing mine, & the inhuman figure dashing from our boat.



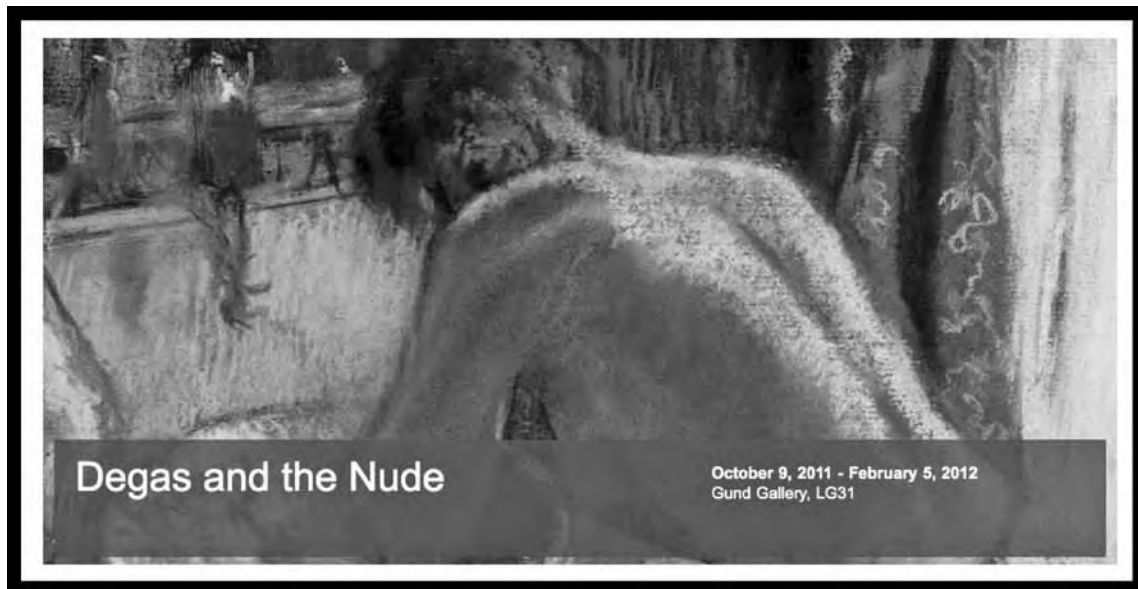
*Hermann Dudley Murphy, "Moonlight, Woodstock,"
1905, oil on canvas*

Was it guns or 'crackers we heard that night,
o we listened for hours. When the sky
grew bluer despite the deep hours still, &
roughened up like hard seas, & there were no stars
even as there were no clouds, just what
I say, the moon, tiny, weak, remained.

The brew of toeless sprites had been strong,
beyond bitter, but its teases, tossings, &
eventual turbulence did not explain. I turned
to them & they nodded. When the last light
in the village in those far hills went dark,
it was time. No matter the frothing skies,
nor the labial pink lacing the fragile moon.

We would go, torn inside by days of fasting,
tipped hard by the brew, there, the last
went out & what had been earth under
our feet defined itself as a hard floor,
unattached to the earth, now rocking,
now rising, o, why did I still wonder
about the gunfire or 'crackers, the lost moon
in its crying waters, what else, we are
moving up, straight up, toward the secret see of seas.





Edgar Degas, "Girl Putting on Her Stockings," about 1877, monotype

Every hour of the day is a tiring one.
 I hear rain, dream rain, rain has
 purpose, maybe several, float, fall,
 pond. My new stockings are taut,
 like I was, *oh shit*. A knock. I ache.
 Dreams of rain & rest. Falling to grass.

Edgar Degas, "Woman with a Towel," 1894 or 1898, pastel

The new one said I have a fairy's face
 & a whore's physique. His towel is
 thick, woven with money, leers softly
 upon my skin. He hears my talk of God
 & asks will God keep me when my breasts
 sink, ass thicks or thins. When he sees
 me reading my books, he laughs, gestures,
 I come to him. I let him know secret things—





**Asked/Answered**

Do you believe in the soul,
 why you have one or
 don't have one and, by the way,
 do animals have one?

Reasons are such small things:
 mustard seeds,
 page numbers,
 skin cells.

Does it matter why your remorse
 is poured out like blood from the pierced side
 of a saint or a thief, your anxiety
 in rivulets running down a rock?

Small things:
 corn kernels,
 grape seeds,
 neutrinos.

It is July and the streams are full
 and racing through the places where streams race.
 Where will they end up?—in the sea.
 Why there?—Why anywhere?

All of this has been asked
 and answered before. We will be
 christened and we will have to reply.
 Our hearts will be kearned across time

and our reasons will be pin holes
 in the night sky—distant, brilliant—
 like stars.

* * *



Mill Fire in Oswego, New York, 1835
George N. Barnard, Photographer

In the daguerreotype,
the mill is hell reaching to heaven,
the sins of war shrieking to the citizenry
in a kind of Technicolor. A boat going by
has returned from—oh, who knows—a delivery
of hay bales or cotton. The rowers row, keep their
backs to the fire. They're not thinking of Sherman or
his damned march. They are tired, thinking "home, bread, stew."

* * *

Charoset

Rivka says he blushes all over,
his skin first stings her tongue
then strokes it with treacle.

Rivka holds my hand and says
His teeth nip at her lips and
Bring out blood drops.

Rivka brushes my hair. She says
His scent of rare spices makes her drunk
and has invaded her dreams.

She tells me she understands, finally,
Why her mother called sex
“the most complicated mitzvah.”

I am pensive, hand her my lavender
pomade, my matching combs. “I understand,”
I tell her, “he was with me once upon a time.”

* * *

Toast

Watching the dead rise has become
our newest, least forgiving hobby.
We wake, have coffee, or a bun, or a piece of toast
and begin a kind of scrapbooking—

Mother first, then Daddy, then Aunt and cousins—
what they said, how they looked and played.
How we hurt each other, how they were
never there for us (as no one ever is).

Then, first love, first heartbreak
(and there have been too many of them),
first job, first marriage, sometimes
second and third (all of them real brain bleachers).

First child—how strong, how beautiful!
Second child—so sweet, hated naps.
Friends—old now, moved away or dead,
waiting to have their words and deeds remembered

(and we do that. It is the foundation of this pastime).
It takes until late afternoon to let the dead rest
while we go off to be ourselves. The long hours to night,
dinner (mother's recipe for meatloaf),

the before-dinner drink and then, later,
a bedtime toddy to take the chill off.
We lie on our backs in bed and watch the dead rise until
sleep pulls us under—our denial of all resurrection.

* * * * *





Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Six

*"The bud
stands for all things,
even those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing:
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on its brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely"*
—Galway Kinnell,
"St. Francis and the Sow," 1980.

It was the breathing of the others that brought me to, nobody was crying at first, just breathing, & I moved a little & felt the bindings. I panicked when I felt the air cool on my skin . . . on a lot of my skin. I think I was naked, or pretty close, & it was like my legs were parted & my knees bent. I swallowed my terror & tried to remember, breathed slow like it was my only hope to live five seconds more, tried to remember:

Someone said: "God punishes sluts like these but he takes too long. We pick up the slack."

But then something else. There were always drunken hillbillies around, you just moved in numbers & they kept away. Most were too stupid.

No, there were others & they hurt those hillbillies.

What . . . what?

There were others here with me. I try to adjust my eyes to the near dark to count. Three, maybe four. Of course, our dates aren't here.

The bindings don't hurt but have no give to them. My wrists are held at each side of my head, my ankles are clasped too.

A whisper: "Are you OK?"

"No, I'm not fucking OK!" I say suddenly, brave a moment then realize I'm a fucking moron.

The others shush me with panicked grunts.

Time passes. Crying does no good. There's nobody to beg with our tears. We don't say anything.

The worst thing is that these aren't my friends. Whoever took us assumed that. We were all dressed alike, all in a bunch but I didn't really belong. "I have a fucking brain!" I want to scream & don't. My brain isn't spread wide, is it?

There's something I'm missing. I'm groping & realize it's drugs. We were drugged & it's still affecting us. Fear is wearing it off but slowly. Maybe when it's gone they'll return.

It won't help but I try to suss out where we are. There's four of us, that makes sense. No escorts,

that too. We're in a room with no windows. It smells . . . clean. Anti-septic? I think I'm on the floor, a blanket under me, my wrist & ankle bonds bolted to the wall & floor. The others are restrained in the same way. We're lined up; I suppose with a little light someone could stand in front of us, walk back & forth, consider our wares.

I almost laugh. These three fake tits peroxide bimbos & me, the sci-fi nerd in a borrowed party dress.

I hope it's quick but I don't think it will be. I don't feel like I was fucked when I was out, so why would someone rush it now? I'm admiring him, or them, putting us side by side isn't helping us team up; fuck no, every one of us is hoping he'll use up the others & get exhausted.

Him. Them. No, him. Boys share sometimes but not like this. He might have had help but we belong now to just one. He might let them have a taste but we're his. We're not gagged so he doesn't care if we scream.

I wonder what he's like. I want to know his name. I hate him & I'm afraid of him, but not completely. I—

"Hey, can you move?"

"What?"

"Can you move at all?"

"No. I'm fucking chained like you."

"If we can move closer, maybe we can free each other."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Shhh. We're trying to help."

"Who the fuck are any of you? This is what bitches like you bring on us."

"What the fuck?—"

I start to lose it. "I was so fucking stupid to go with you! I mean a fucking retarded moron."

"What's wrong with her?"

"With me? We're fucking chained here with our cunts positioned to be fucked! Maybe this is your fun—"

The yelling is actually good, it clears my head. Also, I was pissed. I also see, or hear, that they are terrified too, & they're not unified. Every chained girl for herself.

Even with a clear head, I don't see an escape. Will he go down the row of us, so the others have to listen? I don't think so, but I have no reason to believe that. One think I know: he'll do as he pleases when he wants to.

I almost decide to sleep when there is a small noise. The others cry out, stifle their cries right away. I wait. I listen. I don't think it's him.

I don't want a fucking minion. Some fucking shaved head who dragged us here & now gets his taste.

My thoughts at this point don't make any sense. I have no choice in any of this & I should be ready to beg and scream.

I think of Jazz & Ashleigh & the things they told me. I should be with them not these dumb fucking cunts.

It was in my childhood & I've never been sure it was a dream. A big house by water & a foot-bridge. A city skyline in the distance.

There was a girl sometimes. Pretty, blonde with pink streaks. Her name was Maya but I called her something else. She called me Christina. This was before it changed of course.

Thing is, about it being a dream or not, I didn't live near a pretty house like that, or a stream, or a foot-bridge. There was a city but its skyline wasn't like this one, which was like castles. Mine was modern, steel & glass.

I was a lonely child, big glasses, chubby, shy, lived in my books & head. I didn't care why Maya

liked me. She did. She really did. She said I was a diamond in the rough. I liked that. I remembered that. I remembered when I started going to the gym on my own, learning to work out. There was money I had, so I paid a trainer nobody knew. Ha. Nobody knew how much training I got then.

I remembered when my body was tight & I learned how to dress. Then I learned more than that. I never left my books entirely & I began seeing in high school how people began dividing among the brains & the bodies.

So what the fuck am I here? It was a dare. A stupid dare. The kind Maya warned me about when I was still a diamond in the rough.

She said *pretty girls play the pretty game.*

What's that?

Who's prettier?

You!

No, I don't mean that, I mean they play games at who's prettier. There are reasons for this.

What reasons?

Well, they think it's for the boys, to win their attention.

Oh.

But it's more.

More.

It's about power, Christina.

Oh.

Just be careful.

What do I do?

*Remember that your power is not in how you look to others
it's in here (head)*

& here (belly)

& here (heart)

& here (loins)

& here (hands)

& here (feet)

When I hear his voice finally I think I am going to break down. It's Kinley. Kinley!

The one teacher who mattered to me in high school. The *only* one. Not because I fucked him—there were a couple of those but they didn't *matter*—no, Kinley taught me.

I thought about it. I decided either he was gay or I wasn't smart enough for him. Maybe he just wasn't into young pussy but shit they *all* were, even the women.

Not Kinley. He was there to teach if he had to tolerate a full front row of miniskirted crotchless shaved beavers to do it.

He was on a mission. Sometimes he seemed desperate for us to learn, or even one of us.

I think it was me.

Now I hear his voice & it hasn't changed. I'm sure it's him.

I start to reassure the others then stop. Why is Kinley mixed up in this? I hear his voice but he's tied up, not coming in here yet.

I think. Kinley would say there's no center to reach toward nor edge to fall off. I didn't think he always believed this.

Kinley, a sex maniac? Well, sure, maybe. But I don't know.

These others weren't in my high school. They probably don't know Kinley.

Is this about me then? Was Kinley trying to get me & they got caught up in it?

But why all this? Why tie us up & position us for fucking?

Kinley. *Fuck.* What?

Think. Think. Was he married? All those bathroom bitches knew shit like that. Maybe. Divorced? Separated?

Something. Not quite yes, not quite no. Think. *Think.*

If Kinley wants to fuck me, that's fine. Even tied up, even an audience. Fine. But the why is the part that bothers me. And I think I hear other voices. I don't like to think of Kinley with partners. He moved free, back then, I could tell. Had worse shit to think about than popularity in the staff room.

So much sex in that school. Maybe I knew it better than most because I moved around. Not sure how I eluded the slut tag, but it was my grades if nothing else. Maybe "secret slut." Maybe I didn't care.

The teachers I did fuck didn't know Kinley. One figure me out though.

"You'll do any dirty thing for me, won't you, baby."

I nod wetly, wishing I could just snap off his nice prick from the useless rest.

"Just so long as I don't fret you calling me Kinley when you cum." Laughs. Fucks me harder like a cock can make me forget his comment. It was like that.

Then Kinley's class. Came in & threw open the windows like he was choking.

He taught different classes or with him it was one class but someone else would call it Science or History or Literature.

Same books. Every time. Huxley. Rilke. Rumi. Dickinson.

A noise. The girl next to me is crying.

"What?" I say annoyed.

"I'm scared."

"Of what? Sex?"

"They'll hurt me. I know what it's like."

"What's it like?"

I don't ask wanting to know or fucking caring. I'm trying to remember the dare—

"It's getting breasts and a new step-daddy all in one year"

"Yah." I hope that shows I don't care.

"He'd get me good & drunk. I got so I'd do whatever he wanted if he started in right when I got home."

"So you seen it all, huh." A little humor maybe.

She starts crying again, like they stole her from Mother Superior's own godly arms.

The dare. It was me & the least stupid one. I offered to help her study. She offered to teach me about guys. I accepted.

Now, Maya, why did I do that?

You're lonely. You'd like a friend.

Yah.

You're curious what another girl knows? Compare notes.

I nod.

Maya laughs.

Thing is, I could accept this as a bad night, or as a night when Kinley walked back into my life. *Not both.* Fuck no. I don't want to watch him with any of these things. And, fuck me if I don't want to be watched with him. The only boy or man I cared about back then, partly because I couldn't get him, but it was why. Not love for another woman, or man, or whatever.

Kinley had an idea & that was his goddess. If I could have gotten to it, put it on, jumped in his bed wearing this idea. But I couldn't get what it was.

He didn't seem to like it, or even want it always.

It's one other with him, I've figured that much out. This situation is making me madder, & strangely jealous, more & more.

I start to doze. It's dark. I don't care. Then a voice.

"Why the X?"

"What?"

"Sh. Why the X?"

"Oh. I don't know. Something different."

"That's it?"

I talk loudly now. "Look, my two loved ones growing up were a girl in my dreams who *might* have been real too, & a teacher who everyone but me thought was insane, & then he disappears. *What the fuck*, Kinley."

The other girls scream but, with a word, silence. I don't know what word, again.

"Go on."

"Go on what?"

"Take it. Rough, soft. You went to a lot of trouble."

"No."

"Yes."

"We had different reasons."

I nod. That makes sense.

"He's out for awhile."

"Bringing friends?"

"Maybe. We have to go."

"What about us?" the others start going bat-shit when they see Kinley is untying me.

He looks at them. "I'll tell you honestly. Get them all drunk, they'll be in & out before you know it. Empty their wallets, call it a night."

He & I leave like that. Just fucking like that.

We drive awhile, in silence. Am I supposed to care about those girls back there? I guess, but I'm thinking Kinley's advice sounded good. Sooner or later enough liquor will put a man out & if you can give him one hard ride along his way, whatever you want is yours to take.

Fuck, 'stina? Is this what I am now?

"Don't worry."

"Kinley, stop the fucking car."

"Should I turn around?"

"No. Just stop."

"OK." He waits.

"Just tell me. What was all that for?"

"I told you. Different reasons."

"Tell me *yours*."

He's silent. That deep silence before something that matters is said. I wait. I don't even think of it as waiting.

"I never should have let you get away."

"When?"

"Back then. I knew what you were."

"What was I?" I say it & regret saying it simultaneously.

"Sorry."

"It's OK."

"What would we have done?"

"What we're doing now. Without all this."

"Why all this?"

"You couldn't know. It had to be this way."

"Why?"

"Look, it's what it is. I want you to come with me now, tonight, we keep driving, eventually we get a different car, but we keep going. We stay together. That's the one rule from now on."

"What are we running from, Kinley? What about those girls?" I say that & realize we both know I don't give a shit what happens to them. I want this too, whatever it is.

"I told you. They'll be OK. Really, I don't even know if anything at all will happen to them." He's drifting, not into sleep, but away from me.

I try to pull him back. "They seemed pretty lined up for consumption."

He nods. He drives. Eventually I lean close to him, & his arm loosely encircles me. Yah, this is the guy I fall for, this is the one I end up with on a nice little thousand mile drive, just a pretty young girl & her beau—

there we went—

"You're the missing piece in Preacher's life"

"He wasn't Preacher back then"

Bowie nods, motions Xtina to take a better hold of his hard prick. She does. Good girl.

i. / xxi. / c.

"Truth is a pathless land" someone says & there is a laugh, a second, a third, "like when the dead return in dreams" there is silence, awe "helpless, breathless" still silence but more breathing "or the lost lover, never was a goodbye, a thank you" now one is angry "a shared nod of failure"

"What the fuck" says the angry voice—

Shh! The theatre again stills

the voice is shown by colors, his breathing now heavy & sickly, years going with every few words—

"There was my father taxiing me back to kin, & here I was in the back seat, complaining I'd forgotten my notebooks, or maybe I'd lost a page or two, or again that lover, left to me a dictionary marked with cryptic directions to reach her, reach back to her but she was now old, she was many years older than me now as she'd once been many years younger, & her twin daughters with me in that taxi, me between them, we three comprising one smile & our hands twined & intending—"

The theatre screen blurs, blackens, seems nearly to burn. We were expecting something. It was that

Krishnamurti shit thrown in this time. But it could have been a trick. It's hard to tell.

Some get up to leave. We don't move. It doesn't work like that. The new ones sometimes don't get it. They think it's like "hey cool let's drop a dose of shrooms & go see **RemoteLand!**" like it's, what, *Rocky Horror Picture Show? The Wall? 2001?*

They don't get that it's progressive. It *fucking changes*. We see it. We don't leave. I'm not sure we can. What else is there?

But some stay, a few. We try to work with them.

OK, yah, there was a girl & that was some trouble. I mean for about five minutes it was perfect & made sense & I swear it all changed, there was no car crash, & get this, *Jack didn't jump the bridge*. Cops came, & parents, & I'm probably still wanted because she—

she smelled perfect, just sweat & soap & she was all dreams & gropings, it was in the theatre handicapped bathroom nobody liked to use—

"tell me all you know"

"I don't know anything"

"touch this" *o god*

"now this" *fuck*

"tell me"

she was all over me but we didn't know what we were doing, i forgot that, or remembered it, I was kissing her & my hands on her shirt on her bra, *o god*, her clothes came partway off & mine did too & I couldn't breathe just touching & something, touching her breasts, her moans, little ones, & something, she wasn't sure but she was pulling me closer, she wanted me *in* & something & something

"Shit you're crying"

"Shhh"

"What's wrong? Don't you like me?"

"I do. I don't know."

She's waiting for me, is all. Somewhere in my stupid mind is the thought "*just stick it in & she'll be happy*"

but something—something—I try to—something—she jerks when my head and mouth push between her thighs—when I lick she gets spooked—something—

o shit o shit o shit o shit—I get in three long hard licks & she panics—we each escape with our arms full of clothes, in different directions—

Nobody finds me—we hide well—it's an old theatre—

"Was it worth it?"

"I don't know"

"Was she good?"

"Yah. But not that good."

"Did she push you away?"

"No."

"What then?"

"She wanted to know things."

"We don't fucking know anything, dude."

"That's not it."

"You should have fucked her or given her to me."

"No. Shit. *What the fuck.*"

It's then I realize I'm on my own. He doesn't believe or he doesn't care anymore. I try to think.

People keep coming & going. I'm alone. I see how it changes. It's not about the beauty & truth of it, the mystery. It's about what to do next.

When she comes back it's awkward. We both know she's run away. We both know what she wants.

"It's not like it was. You know that."

"That doesn't matter."

"You can be with me."

"I don't know your name even."

"I'm Cordelia."

"No. You're not."

"I *am*."

I look at her. "How?"

"How what?"

"You were in the White Woods. With Global Wall. You helped him."

She smiles. "Things change. You know that."

"No. You're younger. You're—"

"Yah, all that I know."

"How."

"We made a deal."

She won't tell me more. We sleep in the theatre, which I usually don't do anymore. Cops come around more.

My partner & friend is gone. Cordelia takes his place. She watches me as much as **RLand**. I ask her why.

"I was there. You know that."

"I know some."

"I just don't know what you want from it."

"How can you know its not just a film & not care?"

She looks at me with her shiny cherry lips & tinted pigtails, her pink halter top & jeans shorts, makes me look at her, see she is presenting herself for me, reminding me of that grope in the bathroom—

"Do you want to go there?"

"Where?"

"The White Woods?"

I stare at her.

"I never left. I'm still there. That's how it works."

"Then how—"

"I told you, I made a deal."

ii. / xxii. / xcix.

What's left not sentiment let abide. What isn't sentiment? Once a presence came to me & declaimed to be always with me. I remember this tonight & wonder if it's sentiment to do so.

Tell me what is sentiment & what isn't.

Sentiment is what remains when all else goes.

Then why do I distrust it?

Sentiment is the rust of years. How they stick together, tell their story.

I look at Rebecca.

"Keep breathing."

"Tell me about sentiment."

"It's why you looked at me."

I nod.

"It's not always bad."

I nod.

"There's strength in it."

"Strength & danger. I see it both ways."

"What to do for it?"

"Rebecca, I can't naysay you. You are unique in this story, in all of them. You are good. Artist. Love. Not reasonable in my mind or heart."

"Sentiment."

"Why is that word so important?"

"You've made it an enemy, given it more power than it should have."

"My strength is that I keep moving."

"You strength is that you keep moving & you remember. Both."

I say nothing.

"No, you can't say anything. There isn't anything to say. Keep moving & remember. No truth, no music without this. You know that, *Raymond*."

"Keep moving & remember."

"Yes. Or else."

iii. / xxiii. / xcvi.

"Slow, Slower, Stall, Stop, OK. Stopped. Slow. Less slow. Slower stop. I look around & realize: from the shit of my youth, blazed through by the shine of music, the furious flow of want, I grew, & I am like a tree in that I bear branches in many directions, some great & reaching, with fruit with blooms—some withered, some black with old poisons—

"But here I am, this strange tree of a man & how could it have been otherwise? How?

"And the dull, sleeping faces in every direction? Instructed how & why, & little question in this, hardly enough response to call it a nod, an agreement.

"I resist. I always have. Not because I ever wanted to. No, you see, something was off with me, from early on. I think of it like this: my soul smelled odd. Off.

"Back then, I didn't know. I didn't realize that I was onto something. I cried for how I was off."

Global Wall pauses. His clan sits quietly, especially the youngest one. He starts to drift earlier in the day—

but no—to the story—it's what will bind these small-town blue-hairs to him—do more than strip their wallets—it will leave his stain on them—the virus of his words—



“Many years ago, I was a poor young man. I was angry & bitter, far uglier than I looked. I allowed nothing close, just walked the streets of my city. My hair was unwashed & long. I stole nothing, ate little, slept in an invisible dimension down an alley, dreamed wars & apocalypse on planets I did not believe then were real—”

He pauses. They are confused but rapt. Good. He continues.

“There began to occur a man. More often. He neared me & I knew he did this & did not do it. That is to say, it was not wholly his conscious intention to do so. Those he travelled with filled out the intention, so to speak.

“Eventually we sat together some afternoons, some evenings. He would often talk about needing to make a phone call. He was not asking for money. What he was, was uncertain. Needing to make the phone call kept him moving, one place to the next. They helped him in this way, those he travelled with.

“Eventually he might relax, & begin to speak about other things, preach really, you could say.

“‘Tis said the beast’s beneath the bricks, he told me one night, it was midnight, I was not happy to see him, he diverted me from my own matters some nights, better ones his & my businesses dovetailed rightly.

“‘beneath the bricks,’ he partially repeated, ‘waiting night or distraction or an elixir’s flash of something hungry’—he paused, looked elsewhere which meant he was staring most intensely at me—‘Tis said the erotic coil’s tight & getting tighter, now what will make it burst?’ I’d heard these words before, in variation—‘tis said civilization’s built, trembling, on ruins & bones, breathes & drinks with ghosts.’

(Maya dreams of the dancing white bunny, the glowing white bunny, & here a possibility, a something, she’s been looking, that odd note in things, where dreams nudge in, the glowing white bunny dancing & dancing—there’s more, so much more—this dream a nibble, a stain, something other—a whisper of another way)

He had to make his phone call & one time I went wrong on things & decided it was time—we’d sat at this place & I watched this laughing pink-cheeked girl & thought about other worlds & other years & there was a smell in the air—

he pauses—every blue hair in the room is breathless—even his girls—this is a new story—

“no—there were two smells—one was the slightly salty, slightly moist smell of that girl’s white panties—smell of youth, virginity, the wilds within

“the other was grease—grease for sale—in the form of bad, cheap food—

“I smelled both—it was like a damned choice—my friend started talking & for a moment I was distracted—

“He said tis expected, by many, this world of men will fall to a bomb—or rise to a returned god’s beauteous hour—

“I was sniffing deeper—into each smell—the fecund, pink tightness—the decaying rot—I saw two paths—right or wrong, I saw only two paths—

“My friend looked at me—really looked at me—maybe it was the first time, I don’t know—& he spoke again—

We do not know, Universe, our
flesh hungers for each other, for light, for music,

MY GOD JUST FUCK HER

for answers. We do not know, our hopes
cloak pretty on the beast's shoulders, our fears

GODDAMNITFUCKHER

that the beast is all we really are”

There was a moment of silence. Then I dragged my friend to the payphone on the wall next to the door. I dropped money in the coin slot. “Dial.”

(Maya, follow the white bunny, follow her dancing, I have often thought she is another way, something in this, I can't say more than that, but take your manuscript & hurry!)

I made him dial. Every last number. He was sweating, maybe he was crying now. But he dialed every number. I made sure. I listened to the phone ringing. The laughing girl & her companion had left. Her smell was easily washed out by grease.

The blue hairs are shocked & sad & want the finish. Too much for some of them, though who wants to admit such a thing?

“It rang. It rang. He slumped to the ground, I couldn't keep him up. He hadn't wanted to actually call. That's what I learned as a stupid, arrogant young man who now *knew* he *knew* nothing of the world. He had *not* wanted to dial that number.

There is crying but it's hushed, there's too much listening still. “Some things you keep that close so they won't explode & kill you.”

(Dance like her, Maya, don't just follow, dance like the white bunny with the pink nose! Dance & sniff as she does—dance & sniff—)

He remembers: she was first to his bed in the morning. It was almost by agreement among them. Global was . . . changing . . . sick? Maybe nothing. The agreement seemed to be the youngest would discover him best, it had always been easiest for her, & he loved them all helplessly, conflictedly, beyond any surrender—but the youngest—she could even follow him into dreams—he even let her—

What did Global Wall (the white bunny
dream could be a valid (knows something
question, deserts, violence, (she turns back
The youngest one follows (looks at Maya
in, fearlessly, she has (calmly she knows
never feared anything, (something! & Maya
the most dangerous man (has to follow her
is her companion, he (to find out, she
has begun lecturing again (has to keep dancing

to make sure she eats (but as the bunny
 even as they keep moving (goes faster & faster
 & what does he dream (hops faster & faster
 is the question, it turns (Maya needs to hop
 out he dreams of her (too, she is not
 or someone who so (built like a bunny
 resembles her that (but she adjusts
 the youngest one is (she is kind of scrawny
 able to work into (anyway so she
 her dream-body, it (adjusts & follows
 proves easy, this is (quickly along—
 where Global is soft (& hopes they
 est, so much ano (get there &
 ther might have crushed (there explains
 him but she does not (what she needs
 she loves him most (faster & faster
 becomes his closest need (no thought—hopping!

They see two white bunnies flash by—& she smiles at him—her blonde hair is only touched by a few
 blooms—she wears a long light blue skirt & one bracelet for jewelry—& sandals—this is so simple—he
 watches her—waiting for the bad word—half hears it unspoken—something in this—does he notice—
 does he feel the flinch in his heart—the girl she possesses—there is no subterfuge in her—Global
 understood this later—this dream has a sad tinge that echoes back from future better understanding—

“let’s follow” he startles her—this is new—this hadn’t happened before—& it had been one bunny
 every other time—he catches her hand before thinking about it—then she holds on when he shies—
 they run—they follow the white bunnies into the woods—deep into the white white woods—

iv. / xxiv. / xcvi.

The sound of . . . ocean? Wait a minute. Listen! Listen . . . that grinding. A music of power. Oh
 listen. Here is a place to bring all grievings.

Bobbie listens. She finds she’s been listening for a long time. There was a time, previous to this,
 a long ago, when she heard the pink noise—

The . . . pink noise? She keeps listening, tunes down into the sea, there is something in this.
 Old grievings. Grievings impossibly old.

That moment on the beach. Terrifying, breathless, a possession in a glance? How possible? And
 where is this? Too much, too many things, she listens.

He saw & there was a motion to him that was knowing, oh she did & didn’t know how to bear
 it—

A voice, now or then, saying impossibly soft & close, “you became the pink noise that day, I
 felt this fury in my blood stalking me before I saw you, I had sat & watched the waves & listened for
 hours oblivious, & I was done & I knew it but for this trail of spikes through me, I came there, no
 choice, & I waited.

I knew you.

You knew me.

I felt you.

You felt me.

But—

But—

Bobbie jerks, almost braves to wake, allows herself to feel the bed she's in, her nudeness, but—

I couldn't—

You didn't

No—

And now—

And now?

And now!

The sea again. The kelp seaweed freshly washed to shore. The bones of driftwood.

Take me.

No. I left that day.

You left with my scent.

Yes that.

Describe it to me.

Warm, pink, hungry.

What did you do.

Nothing I'd say.

What did you do?

I left, Bobbie. I left that moment & your scent. It got bad in my head but nobody knew. I made money when others didn't. I dated, I drank bourbon, I danced, I bought firearms & voted for right-wing politicians—

And their secrets—

Many of them—

What kind of sex weren't they having?

None. Save for love. They weren't much for love.

Do you love me?

Yes. I do now.

Why?

Because you came to me.

No.

You're here.

No. I'm at the ocean.

Yes you are.

I have a new swimsuit on.

It's pink. A two piece.

My mother hates it. I call her an old whore.

She hits you.

She hit me because her boyfriends all want to fuck me.

Do they try?

I let a couple kiss me & feel me up. No more. I want something.

What do you want?

I want more than the kind of dumb fucks my mother can bring home.

You want how I looked to you.

Yah & that's stupidly fucking funny. Because by this point I should be blowing guys at least.

But you aren't.

No. I'm waiting for you.

You're not just waiting, Bobbie, you're talking to me in dreams.

Yes.

You're conjuring me. You don't half-believe it & don't know how, but you are.

This is what I want.

Now you're here.

I'm at the ocean. In my two piece bikini. Hair down, walking alone, watching the ocean.

I see you. I'm stunned.

I see you & don't look twice.

I did nothing.

Not this time. Do it. Do it now!

"Hello"

"Hello"

"I'm—"

"I know who you are."

"Then you'll—"

"But I'm only—"

"You want to—"

Maya turns to look at me.

"Well?"

"Well."

"What happens next?"

"I ask that too."

She's curious. "Don't you always know?"

I laugh.

"What happens next with that girl?"

I sigh. "Well, maybe she gets fucked. But maybe not."

"What else?"

"Seems like some take control, start to move. Like you. Like Jazz."

"How do you decide?"

"Hard to say. At some point there is a turn in a character's path, & thereafter it's different. I care more. We have a relation of sorts."

Bobbie turns & looks. It's not him in bed next to her. He's watching her like a predator. Without a flinch's flinch, she determines she has panties on still.

He's smiling. "You sleep beautifully," he says, no warmth in his voice. All teeth. She half-smiles.

"I waited," he says softly. "I could have taken you before but I wanted you to be awake."

She, for a lingering moment, feels her face, her neck kissed, her breasts lightly fondled, her nipples tested & teased, then his brutish impatience leads him between her thighs & for this lingering moment she considers giving to it, letting this rough blunt man fuck her for all he's worth, riding him hard, & again, riding him til he cries, & then wants more, make him go on, when his cock can't get hard, push him with words & whispers to do it for her, & just when that seems what—

No. Bobbie sees the gun on the bureau next to him & when he lunges, she twists & grabs the gun more expertly than he could have imagined

Maya looks at me. "Is this the turning point?"

"I don't know. Let's find out."

He squeaks. He actually *fucking squeaks*.

"Hey, I haven't hurt you. Nobody pushed you into this bed."

"I know how I got here. But who the *fuck* are you?"

"Look I paid—but—"

"To what—fuck me?"

Now he gets angry. "Yeah, to fuck you. Give me back my gun."

"What was it for? In case I didn't want to?"

"No!" he snaps & before she can react he snatches the gun back. "I'm a fucking cop." He looks at her & she can see a thought pass over his face & go. He shakes his head. Stands to leave.

"Wait."

"Relax. I'm not that fucked up."

"Don't leave. Talk to me for a minute."

Maya nods at me. I nod back.

"About what?"

"Don't I look kind of young to you?"

"That's what I paid for."

"Look closer." He does. "Whoa."

Bobbie nods.

"Why are you here?"

"I came with my friends. One was trying to find her sister. We all got separated."

He looks at me, & the hunger broods there. I realize I'm standing facing him wearing only panties.

"My clothes"

He starts.

"My clothes, Officer?"

He looks fallen. Strangely, I feel something I shouldn't.

Maya stares at me.

"She has to make this choice."

"What about the man on the beach?"

"Maya—"

She looks angry.

I let him . . . do some things. Not everything but I let him touch me & I touch him how he likes. He wants more but I shake no & he backs off for now.

I need his help & if I have to leash him up a bit, that's OK. He gets this. He fucking nods. It's hard not to laugh at him. But he's got a gun & a cock so I don't. We dress & leave the room.

Maya nods at me. "What now?"

"Look!"

The sound of . . . ocean? Wait a minute. Listen! Listen . . . that grinding. A music of power. Oh listen. Here is a place to bring all grievings.

Maya walking along the shore with others, one is preaching—she lets herself fall back, a step, a few at a time—wills herself to be unnoticed until she is able to dart behind a beautiful old monster of driftwood.

They're gone. They'll find her later, she's sure, but she's managed to graduate from the youth class to the older class without making much notice of it. She sees the boys & girls & their alliances. It does not interest her.

When she beholds Samantha, all the mysteries of the universe present themselves.

"Dean, this is Samantha."

"Hello Dean"

Dean about shits himself as he finds himself standing beside Maya on a seashore & getting introduced to a beautiful naked girl with what looks like seaweed for hair.

"It's OK. I just wanted you to meet Samantha how I met her on the beach. She's my friend. I think she will help sometimes."

Samantha smiles at Maya & her nose looks a little pink & her hair not dissimilar to bunny ears.

Dean nods, & puts a hand forth. Samantha looks at him. Nods at Maya.

"Let him take you to that town."

Maya curls up around her manuscript on a long damp twisted log of driftwood, & she begins to write—

Dean walks down to the surf, he hasn't see the ocean in a long time—he wonders this all but—really—doesn't—Samantha joins him—

"Did you bring me to her?"

"You did more than me."

"You helped."

"I led you to the picture."

"In the window? That gallery downtown?"

Samantha says nothing, yes.

"Why do I have pieces instead of memories?"

"They'll come. The picture was first"

"I don't understand."

"You will."

"Tell me."

"Dean. Tell me."

"Then her?"

"If you will."

He watches the surf, the way the waves cough dirty foam onto the shore, how it slides, almost panicked, along the wet sand, until it is pulled back.

"I was downtown. I had a good buzz." He laughs. "Good." He stops laughing. "It's not that big a downtown so I should have seen that window a thousand times like the rest. Seen & not seen."

Maya writes, summons me to write with her, we bond, we fuse, we are, writes from a memory not her own, someone she knew, someone back there, someone who consumed those around him, who used

his power to induce curiosity, approach, who let the weaker take him, possess him, reduce to bones & smoke in the try, & he would then swallow the rest, & again, he used words like kindling, for snap & spark, fat ugly conflagration, Maya writes *"I'll be the hungry ghost returned to snap at clusters of tight skirts, snap til I hear the one who laughs & wants more, snap till she cries out, till she's urging the rest"*—Maya squeaks, remembers, nods—

they never came for me—I knew what went on—I knew it was called privilege, those nights in those rooms, but they never asked me—I wondered why & never knew & knew—I wouldn't build my own cage & wait for him in it—I was dangerous—how? how? A scrawny girl with a pink cat radio? Was I code & key back then? No. Nothing. I had Samantha but I didn't know what this meant—

"What did it mean?"

"I'm your friend"

"You didn't live there"

"I was with you"

"Always?"

"Yes. Always with you."

"What about my word to summon you?"

"That too."

Maya sighs. Samantha's explanations never really helped. Samantha was her friend, truly & always. The rest was all fuzz. She watches Dean & Samantha at the water's edge, then turns to her manuscript again.

"How are you here?"

"There's no how, Maya."

"Could I do this myself?"

"Of course."

"I'm not ready."

"I don't think you're like me, Maya. I take my notebooks & push deep in them, fall away from others. I think you prefer it this way, with others present like this, passing through."

"Is that possible? This way?"

"Yes."

"We're writing two different manuscripts?"

"Yes & no."

"And the other one?"

"Yes & no."

"You're like Samantha." She pauses. Smiles that sunshine supernova smile of hers. "Yes & no."

Dean. "It was an old photograph, I think but it was but it was strangely alive. I don't know. It was the desert but polar, all snow. I had been staggering down the street, a good morning buzz, & I stopped to cough my lungs up & wish for a cigarette when I looked up & saw it & it froze me. I couldn't move. I was paralyzed. I looked & looked."

Samantha nods. Whatever she is, she knows how to listen.

Maya thinks again. It wasn't sex, exactly. That would have been easier to understand. Not even power, really, it was something of hate, a harm to the world, punish the world, the world is not just fall, the world is evil, living, breathing evil—she writes a fragment: *"the clustered thorn in the preacher's golden costume, now burbling, now biting when he speaks smoothly of God's mystery & suffering, cramp his holy thighs when he lusts, when he loathes—"*

Maya jerks up, looks at me hard—"they hated the world, they hated God, but they thought they could transform it—they could make it something else, make it perfect." She breathes hard. "Make it new."

"The ships overhead."

Dean & Maya speak these words simultaneously.

(The White Woods shakes tonight with the speaking of three words: flesh, chemistry, consciousness. These words said to indicate the bones of the cage are a little plainer to see, that this playing field's distracting lights are less effectual. Words, nothing less, the breath to speak them with mind or lips, one the next, new, again—)

Maya nods at me, crumpled under my own foot & fist & heart, offers me the hand I barely know how to accept, & we stand——

Dean is spent by all this. Maya is right to recognize his strength, power, but he's also rusty, slave to a fair while of brownbag afternoons——

We need to get him shelter, Samantha.

This is not my world, Maya.

He's old & sick in his body & mind.

He needs rest & food.

And you, Maya?

She snaps up. "I need to care for him." Feels danger, the sniff of those who prison others.

"You need him to take you to Wytner soon."

They are not at the ocean. They are back in the city, it is autumn. Sitting on a bench. Dean looks sick & half-asleep.

"It's the booze, Maya. I don't know if I can kick it."

Before Samantha is gone, Maya shakes her head. "No. Stay." There is a pause. "Please, Samantha." Nods.

Samantha fully manifests, powerfully manifests now, maybe more than Maya has seen before. She kneels before Dean who looks at her with fear but, more, trust. They begin to speak in one voice: "When the king raises his fist smiling, would command not just armies of men & machines but the woods, the tides, the moon itself, I'll blind him a moment & give his tongue a heated taste of its own shit——"

Dean coughs hard, but nods. Nods again. "Go," he whispers in a hoarse bark.

Again: "When one man leans on another, measures the world's worth in coin & commodity, when he sharpens others to reck him with quickening breath, I'll crumple his ankle & wither his cock——"

Dean doubles hard over coughing harder than ever, "Go go!" he orders.

Samantha leans forward, her hands on his shoulders, steadying him. He nods harder. "When the lusty crowd denses round a single helpless face, moves in with noose or cuffs, I'll sweat each one with panic,



choke, & tomorrow *your* door, tomorrow *it will be you—*”

He calms a bit, the worst is over though more for them to say. It's easier, quieter this time: “Lastly the child, with her new breast blooming, with his questions shuffled toward thick books & stained glass, I will spend the last of me scrawling over young hearts:

“Nobody knows all! Believe, with every window open!” And again: “Believe, with every window open!” And: “Believe with every window open!” Maya joins in, they steady the three of them, on their park bench, saying this over & over til Deans brings them to a whispering stop. He nods, OK this time.

“Those were my words & what I believed back then. Samantha knew them.” He smiles at her, a genuine smile. But. “I'm not who I was then.”

“You are now what you are because of what you were then.”

“I'm less. I'm old. I'm sick.”

v. / xxv. / xcvi.

Lizzie dreams & in her dream she is someone else. She waits in this room for someone as she has waited many times for him. She looks in the mirror at her face, at her hair, her cheeks he will touch once, twice, before he begins to consume her, before he spirals within her, deeper & faster then slower, no words for what happens, his touches, his smell, his few or no words, she has to dress!—

Lizzie panics as she knows herself to be sleeping, dreaming but she hangs on, remembers what that man said to her, those words as he left with the rest, her still obediently & spread in pink panties on the stage's bed, had said with an easy smile, “you can have anything you want in dreams, if you learn to take them”—she hangs on, fuck, OK, I'm this other girl in this dream & she's waiting for this man who comes & fucks me—no, wait—

looks in mirror again—

does more than that—he ignites me—so we can do something—something very important to him—& he's important to me—

Dreaming, awake, of a double-mind, I take a breath. The bed behind me is large, a red velvet cover on it. Hotel room. Yes, that's where I am in waking too. Same room. Am I waiting for the same man? There was a voice. Made me pose & undress.

But for this man I have to dress. I stand, steady, this girl is smaller than me. We walk over to the closet. The clothes inside are night clothes. I guess I don't go out much.

For a moment I want to wake up. Dream of being some man's paid & kept whore? What the *fuck?*

Think. Think, *Lizzie!*

Who?

Lizzie.

I'm not Lizzie.

I am.

I don't understand.

We're dreaming. I'm in a room you were in, maybe for a long time.

I don't believe you. I have to dress for him.

Who?

He loves me. I'm helping him.

How?

We . . .

I know. He fucks you really good. Something happens.

Yes. But then it didn't anymore. He left me. I tried to get back here. I couldn't.

That's why I'm here.
 I guess so.
 He wants to do the same with me.

I don't know. Who are you?

Where are you now?
 It doesn't matter.
 Tell me.
 There were others later.
 More than one?

None were like him. I met them, they wanted me, I would go with them if they wanted me enough. I thought one of them would do what he did for me. It was so difficult with him.

Difficult?

He wanted more than sex. It wasn't enough for him. He saw me as something, I don't know. Magical. The rest just fuck me.

What's going to happen when he comes?

Did you pose for him?

I think so. But I didn't see him.

I didn't either. You passed the audition though. You're in that room, our room. Right now.

What do I do?

Wake up. Put on the prettiest nightie. At least he doesn't hit.

vi. / xxvi. / xcv.

There are angles in this world that cannot be braided into use, secret chiaroscuros of morning—

Global Wall & the youngest of his girls are sitting together quietly

an empty shore, a quiet water—

the white bunnies had led them a long chase but when they passed into this clearing his girl had stopped their chasing.

"here we are"

down river a mile the remaining bones of a drowned woods—

"where?"

"sit"

"where?"

"sit with me"

he obeyed her voice

in the vague air an unhuman language croons from ten centuries past—

"tell me"

"tell you?"

"all this"

"you want to know"

"go on"

"you want to know what it's like"

"say it"

"how they want me. us. how that feels."

"yes."

she nods. says nothing.
 “what then?”
 “you won’t be the same”
 “i know.”
 “you’ll be in it. how the others are. Jack. Genny. Maya. Bowie. Christa.”
 “I have you three. How am I not as vulnerable & mortal as them already?”
 “You can leave us.”
 “To what? You’re what I have left. I failed. I love you. Here we are.”
 She nods.
 “You doubt me?”
 Shakes her head. Looks up in tears.
 “What?”
 “We were the last ones. The last three. If you stay with us, it binds you to your history. You can’t have us & your freedom both.”
 “I need to know. It’s the price.”

vii. / xxvii. / xciv.

Jazz & Ashleigh talk now more than they ever had before. Toby listens to them, says nothing. He still can’t see.
 “How do we leave?”
 “I am not sure.”
 “I just don’t understand, Jazzy.”
 Jazz knows Ashleigh doesn’t want to understand. She’s getting there but it’s hard.
 “How come we can’t leave? Why don’t I see the Woods? Do you see the Woods?”
 Jazz nods.
 “I wish you had just left me.”
 “No. This is better.”
 “How? We’re trapped. Not even by people. By what? I’d—”
 Jazz shakes her head.
 “I don’t know.”
 “Don’t know much, do you?” speaks up Toby.
 “Shut up, Toby.”
 “No, Ash, it’s OK. Speak your mind, Toby.”
 “Look, I know you can hurt me so don’t worry. I’ll do what you say for now—”
 “But—?”
 “I’m not going punch our way out of here”
 “No. You have an idea?”
 “Do you know what really happened that night?”
 “We were taken in a van”
 “But first we showed up.”
 “Then you left.”
 Toby laughs. No mirth. No fear anymore either.
 “What. *Fuck.*”
 “*We took you.* Got Ashleigh good & drunk. You can’t blame her. She didn’t know what was going on. She thought we left you.”
 “You didn’t.”
 “No. But when you didn’t want to play I had to take care of it.”
 Ashleigh is ready to pounce on him when Jazz shakes her head. “Let him talk.”

"Look, I'm not proud. We were fucking drunk dickheads. I told the others they could watch."
Silence.

"Anyway, we never made it anywhere. We were driving to a cabin. But we never got there."

"How many of you, Toby?"

"Six in all."

"Where are they now?"

Toby laughs. "Trapped here too. Dead. I don't know."

"Don't seem to care either."

"No. And you can hate me & hurt me too but I'm still fucking sorry."

Jazz speaks again. "So we're unconscious in your van. What happened?"

"It was a *fucking spaceship*. And fuck if I hadn't seen it in my dreams before. That's why I drank so much. All of us."

"What *happened*?"

"There was light, too much of it, & I think we crashed. I don't remember much. But both of you were gone. Everyone was gone."

"Then what?"

"I walked through those damned woods for fucking ever. I was afraid to sleep. I thought I'd hit my head. You can die if you fall asleep."

"How did you end up here?"

His voice, sincere, breaking for the first time. "I fucking fell asleep."

"And?"

"I woke up, I was in the van. My buddies were shaking me. They said they knew I was tired from working 3rds but did I want to miss out on the fun? She's your girl, Toby. Yah, & that cherry little sister."

"So you just did it all over again?"

"Look, I figured I was dead. So it didn't fucking matter. I figured I'd end up like before, over & over. Fucking Hell. I deserved it. But then—"

"Then?"

"Yah. Here we are."

"But why?"

viii. / xxviii. / xviii.

He tells Genny he is right behind her, though she's not sure how that happened. Says to not look back, just listen to his voice.

"Why can't I look back?" she demands, Tweety Bird is quiet in her arms. (If she can talk, *if*, I could use a friend. Would be nice.) (*if*)

"Do you want to help me, Aquarius?"

"Call me Genny. And yes, if I can."

Silence.

"If you trust me now, I will sit with you soon, look you in your eyes. I'll tell you things. All your questions, as many as I can answer."

"But?"

"?"

"There's a but in there somewhere, Preacher. I hear it."

Silence.

"Tell me." Her voice is soft & kind now. They are walking through a murk not dissimilar to that experience at the Flying Elephant. But Preacher is no Murk-Man. Not hardly close.

"I have to show you where I died the first time."

She gapes. She stops.
 “Nothing goes away. Nothing returns.”
 Resists turning, shaky, walks on.
 “We’re nearly there.”

Oh. This place.

“The Ampitheatre.”
 “I was here before. But.”
 “Before you turn, I want you to look down there.”
 “The bonfire. The people dancing.”
 “Further along. Down there.”
 “There’s someone. He’s dancing.”
 “Yes. That’s me.”
 “You. How?”
 “This was a long time ago. I was younger & I felt I was done.”
 Something strong in Genny’s heart wakes & locks in. “Why did you do it?”
 “Because I thought there was nothing new left.”
 Teeth clenched. Relaxes. “How?”
 “This is my wake. That’s me dancing at it.”
 “Is there more?”
 “The next morning I felt reborn. New.”
 “What did you do?”
 “You knew me later.”
 Genny senses the wall going up. Thinks. “Will knowing this help me? To help you, I mean?”
 “Watch tonight. If you like, talk to him.”
 “Wait!” Now she turns around & he’s gone.
 “Shit! Fuck!” she screams.
 “Shit! Fuck!” screams Tweety Bird.
 Genny freezes again, holds Tweety out before her. Tweety blinks.
 “How?”
 “Whistler”
 Suddenly exhausted, she sits on the grassy hill, hugs Tweety to her chest anyway.
 Young Preacher down there. She sighs. Dancing at his wake.
 Full moon up there. Always there? Probably. She watches Young Preacher dance by himself.
 He now has a flashlight, is swinging it around as he dances. The drums are getting louder. She watches him, sets Tweety Bird on her lap to watch too. Tweety says nothing more. (Whistler)

She remembers one of Preacher’s last times. It was ending. Something bad had happened. What? Something. Another fucking gap.

His Phalanx of fine pussy had shrunk to three girls. Both the others fairly new but very different. One young, Genny fairly sure a runaway. Felt sorry for her as she tried every skanky outfit in her beatup suitcase to catch Preacher’s eye. The busty ones. The tightass ones. She was a hot little number too, almost too much—

The other one was older than Genny, & actually more of a threat. A talker, a thinker. Preacher noticed her a few times & in those later days he wasn’t noticing much anymore—

What the trouble was, fuck if I know. But every event was nearer the last when nobody had said a word about it.

Wasn't a hall even. They were appearing in parks. Usually a few drunks & homeless around; listen, see if some food or coins would come of it. None stayed long. The young girl attracted them, even before Preacher. If Preacher had told her to down on her knees, service every bum & then he'd notice her, she was ready. The older one handed out pamphlets. New ones, I swear they were mostly pictures & the text in a foreign language. Strangely I did nothing. I think I figured it didn't matter. But I also obsessed in my secret beast's heart for how to end up with Preacher when it was over. I was a little crazy too. I didn't mind thinking about a pack of bums carrying off the girl & consuming her whichever way they wanted. The older one I'd have to be more clever with. But I didn't *do* anything.

He stood, this time. Sometimes he didn't anymore. Talked hardly loud.

"What diminishes, in some hours, is not just the want to know, but the faith anything can be known"—I noticed a couple of pretty dirty bums nearing where Cindy—Cindy?—sat, looking, maybe a word or two. She was sitting cross-legged on the grass. Blouse a plain tale of 34Bs sans bra, crossed legs from the right angle showed a shaven pink thing tight as a—"answer not fruited of hustle or delusion, the questions asked the skies on worst nights, & those other glints nearly touched on others, can sum, manifest, fold the world gently open"—fuck! Cindy had a breast out & cupped in her hand, fingers pinching the big tight nipple, mouth open in silent moan—the bums backed away a few steps—the older one was dancing in the grass, hearing his words & then saying them back softly in echo—I remained quiet & still—

"& limited view will reveal finely in music, a mystery more beautiful because made more plain"—he stood, looking directly at the bums who were watching Cindy silently orgasm & roll to the ground, legs open—then Preacher walked away & I followed—& now I wonder if that was the last event or not—I sit here & I seem to fucking remember less clearly all the time—

ix. / xxix. / xcii.

Bowie pushes hard, up, down, in, out, yanks, screams soundlessly, rushes wild purpose through his blood & his bones, heats his flesh beyond white pain then drops suddenly below freezing, screams more, a cry from every inch of him—

the mushrooms relent, or chance he will destroy his physical self—they know Bowie will if pushed too hard—

He wakes, opens his eyes, panting, deep wounds in him no medic could find. But OK, awake, eyes open.

Chicken shack. Well. Sort of. Never really was what it seemed. Portal? Kind of. Spaceship? Not like the ones overhead; it doesn't move in the same way. More . . . *doesn't* move while everything else does. Sometimes, oddly, doesn't move very fast & very far.

Beam me up, Aesop.

He tries to trace back. Sam in the bar. Paula's bed. Benny. Christa saying she knew how to help. There's no way to untangle each & know how real. "Real."

He rubs his unshaven cheek. Looks around. Nothing. Nothing really. The mushrooms have withdrawn for now.

He's glad to be free of them for a moment, as free as he can be, but he also needs them to recover Preacher & Rosie. They are the accelerant. The best one.

Dreams are another. Benny's domain. He considers. Shroom space & dreamspace—they are not exactly different—that's the best way he can put it to himself.

Stands, falls. Oh. Laughs. Stands again. He's awake, since he can't make the pain in his ass diminish faster than it will.

Thing is, it *is* a fucking chicken shack. Is, isn't. Both, each, yes, no. The world is many things simultaneously. Many worlds. That's the trick to things. One stuff, many stuffs. One kind, many kinds.

One motive, many motives.

The ancient “why?” question is its own answer. Why? Why. That’s all Bowie has really for guide.

From Preacher. Who else?

Preacher. Why? Why.

He sighs. Loudly. Preacher. Rosie. Why? Why. OK. Back to work then.

Considers. Shroom space. Dreamspace.

Chicken shack. Paula’s fine ass.

Gretta’s sweet mouth. Preacher’s deep madness, deep & clear. His father.

Maya. White Woods.

A memory. A regret. A funny regret. There was a door opened to him long after he could use it, & only briefly.

I was already a spy, meaning more & less than the word itself. Spy is a verb, not a noun. Preacher would reply I had it back assward but I never laughed. I was a spy long before anyone paid me. I’m a spy now & I don’t think I work for anyone anymore.

A woman, of course. A strange, beautiful woman in a cafe late one night. A conversation.

I sniffed her first, of course. Part of being a spy is retraining your sense. A sound, a smell, clues weren’t too often words, & I knew also she deliberately sat near me.

Espresso. That acrid smell, more waking than the drink itself. I listened to her breath, the small movements of her body in her seat. I hadn’t looked. I didn’t need to or want to. Preacher would say of such a moment, do it, own it, master it, move on.

“The Beast is relentless, one way or another.”

“How do we win?”

“We don’t, partner. None of us. Our grace is in how we fall.”

“That’s bullshit.”

He laughed. “Sure it is. And roses grow from bullshit. And mushrooms.”

Fucking Preacher.

Alone, scented, late night cafe. A fight, a break up? Sex mingles with everything a woman says, does, thinks.

“You simplify them, Bowie”

“Tell me I’m wrong.”

“You’re not wrong but somehow—”

“What?”

He would shake his head. Strangely I agreed with him.

I still kept notes on cases back then. Not many & I knew enough to leave out, contradict, burn. Preacher laughed at me. He said it didn’t matter a damn one way or another.

“Nobody wins.”

“Then why do we fight? Why all this?”

“Yes. Why.”

I knew tricks. Not fair ones. I could sniff myself right through her garments. Hadn’t been fucked in a few days. Ripe, tight. Older than me. Shadows.

“36B. Shaven. Black thong.”

I nearly jumped through the window. Said nothing.

“I know you’re curious. No offense taken.” I said nothing still. A spy too?

“Who isn’t? What else?” I said nothing.

“It’s OK. I went first anyway.” Nothing still. Testing? Terrified? “Come with me. I’m getting out tonight. I almost spoke.

“Let me tell you a story. By way of pedigree. Tonight I found my lover’s cock so deeply up my best friend’s ass I think it was poking out her cunt. He was fucking her in our bed, his & mine. Not in the bathroom or against a wall like other times. If I was a man, I would want to fuck her too. She’s pretty, she’s light. Pour a pitcher of angry cum into her, she squeals prettily & takes it with the right amount of pain. And gratitude.

“But our bed. Shouldn’t be different, should it? His cock in another woman’s twat, one place or another, what difference? Some I guess. It was because of a dream he had in that bed, that he told to me. A long time ago. He woke up, screaming, whimpering, & took what seemed like half the night to tell me this dream he’d had.

“Lick it. Now. Once. Then I’ll tell you.”

In a far curled place in my mind I lick that tight shaven thing of hers long & slow, I lick it while she trembles, grasps, breathes hard, lick it younger, tighter, she twists, yanks, cries soundlessly, lick it while she thinks of what this one or that one, books, family, God, *oh god o god o god o god o god o god*

cum for me very quietly.

now.

she does.

x. / xxx. / xci.

“There was a movie theatre he’d loved when he was a teenager. Nada Theater. Something like that. It closed & broke his heart. Just broke his damned heart. He didn’t have any friends really, too serious, too fucking *weird*. I mean it’s why we. When we did. Then her. But it wasn’t.”

I lick again, this time very, very gently, the pink edges of your cunt, over & over, gently, round & round. Then your clitoris. Then I bit but

no.

don’t cum.

no.

go on.

“He told me he dreamed about it. He said he couldn’t get in. He said he had tried & tried.

“I let him. Cry. I don’t know. Then he said something about it being trapped. What? I asked. He didn’t know. A film? The whole theatre. He really didn’t know. We didn’t talk about it later. I really wondered if it had happened at all. Maybe it was my dream.”

Now. cum hard.

“Fuck!” “Fffuck!”

“That’s what I thought about when I walked into our bedroom tonight & found him pounding the fucking shit out of my friend’s sweet little ass.”

I still don’t move or speak out loud.

“So I’m going. I’m tired. I need a new line to buy.”

“Got one?”

I look back at you & think that I didn’t really make you cum. It’s not that hard. You were keeping my interest while you told me that story.

What was rare though is that the options were there for me. Thought I hadn't looked at you or said a word out loud, you would have followed me back in or out, something stupidly miraculous happened there & then but—

Preacher would say you are why I now have Gretta & Christa. That I'm collecting my way back to you. Then he would laugh like he'd just farted, but hadn't.

xi. / xxxi. / xc.

Charlie Pigeonfoot, oh what a name! When the world falls down to its last, we'll only have him to blame!

Charlie Pigeonfoot, what do you know tell us true! You dreamed you made a new world from burning this one in your stew!

Charlie Pigeonfoot Charlie Pigeonfoot, *Charlie Pigeonfoot!*

"Charlie"

"Charlie!"

"Charlie Pigeonfoot!"

"That's not his real name. Maybe that's why he doesn't answer."

"Who is he? Is he famous?"

"That's what they said. He painted pictures. Weird ones."

"Like Andy Warhol? Or that guy who did *The Scream*?"

"Yah. Maybe. I don't know. I just know he's here on our freaking couch & we gotta help him."

"Help him? We're living in the back of a fucking movie theatre! Who's helping us?"

"Look, they don't kick us out, right? I mean they know we're here & nobody calls the cops. This is a favor for all that."

"Look. I mean this shit is scary. What if he dies. Are we being set up? Crazy movie fan squatters kill old famous artist?"

"Yah, sure. I don't think so. He's just old & a little beat up. Not too bad."

"Who would beat up an old artist? I mean *fuck*."

"Yah. I know. Well, he's here with us. Let's look at it that way. Your girl isn't here."

"Fuck you. She'll be back."

"Yah, she'll bring the fucking cops."

"Fuck you, man!"

Charlie wakes groggy in this dim place to two ragged looking boys screaming at each other. He can't recall the how or why of here, the what of it. Anything.

"Hey, sorry."

"Yah, man, you OK?"

Charlie breathes heavy.

They forget their quarrel for a minute & tend him. By dumpster diving in nearby allies they've gotten a supply of clothes, blankets, canned food. They help him into clean clothes, feed him soup, get him comfortable on the couch they take their turns sharing. Two sleeping bags for them nearby.

Charlie pats each on the shoulder & nods weakly. Then falls to sleep.

"I think that's all we can do for him for now."

"Yah. Poor guy."

"He's safe here."

Pause. Then the inevitable question.

"Think the white bunnies will show up tonight?"

"Probably, yah."

"Should we try to catch them or talk to them?"

"It never works, man. They're not real like we are. I don't know what the fuck they are really."

"Yah."

"Look, it's OK. Maybe they're just checking on us. Protecting us. You never know."

"Yah. I guess."

"Just get some sleep. Maybe this guy will talk in the morning."

"I, um"

"What?"

"Nothing."

They sleep. They white bunnies appear as they do every night, hopping in a double blur through the theatre, across the movie screen like images but then through the aisles & then into the back room where the three sleep.

They hop through a crack in the wall a little wider tonight, now almost visible to human eyes, & are again gone———

Now look up! Look around. Yes. Charlie is a boy in his dream, or at least folded helplessly into his own past—he knew a woman, knew her in the last years of her career as an artist—saw what she was going for—the way she grew more & more porous before her canvas—he thought of them as her "blood canvases," which is of course what he later named his own series of paintings—pictures which made & broke him again & again—

& here she was—not the first time to appear in his dreams—they were hardly even dreams anyway—more a baseless well he visited through sleep—on sleep's other side—& he barely remembered them when back again awake—yet they drove him, much of what he did—even in the nuthouse & when it got bad again & again

She painted—always closer & closer—always the sea—& he knew by her strokes, her pauses, her facial expressions, how close this time to the last day—& he was never there when she put down her brush—or broke it, or whipped it into the sea—& do what, if he had been? Stop her? Stop the sunrise, stop love or hate or growth or change—

He talked, she painted, the sea moved nearer & farther—he was here to learn—he barely remembered his waking life on the other side of dreams—

"Why the sea?"

Silence. Then she laughed. "There are three answers to that."

"Tell me."

"The first is profound so it means less to me personally. I dreamed God was the sea & my way to pray to him was this, this unfinished picture among all my finished ones, unknown to dealers & those who admire me. This is my pact, my prayer, my choice how to praise & thank."

Long pause. "The second is I don't know why. I began this canvas long ago. I was a different person then. This picture is what connects us, her & me. She & I." She laughs again.

Pause. He waits. The sea.

"The third?"

She begins slowly. "I was a girl the first time I came here. I was pretty & foolish but I had something. I came here again & again. Always wore my yellow swimsuit. It left little unexposed. I liked it. I felt the hungry stares, their intensities, some kind, sweet, some dark, violent. I absorbed them for a long time, thinking I'd learn & then know desire."

"Did you?"

"No," she says flatly. "Not then. Not since. Eventually I covered up, grew serious, left something behind. Became less strange to who I am now. Here I am."

Charlie nods.

Another time:

"Did you marry?"

"I'm a grandmother! My granddaughter calls me Mimé, which is sort of French for granny."

"Sort of?"

She laughs.

"She's a darling. I don't see her often. She makes cassettes of music she records from the radio. Rock and roll. Not bad. I listen when I go to sleep at night. Strange lullabies."

He nods.

Closer, she says less:

"Who am I to you?"

"Don't you know?"

"I don't know a lot." Grimaces.

"You visit. We talk."

"I want to break through."

"Yes. You say that."

"I don't know who but I think I can." She nods.

"Help me?"

She nods. Says nothing.

xii. / xxxii. / lxxxix.

When you begin to elude fear & doubt hope, heed what oncomes, despite.

(I ask: how did I used to write? How did I used to live? How did that & that lead to this, & this to some hereon?)

When you nod with others in the amber-smoked room, avoid what pulsates, what lures, want unsated, these centuries of men.

(I ask: what do I want to write now? Which words & how? Beyond expectation, long since goodbye to masters, what?)

When some year, some quietly violent hour comes that you reck the trees new, all beauty, but no example, save endurance.

(Words do what they do, are what they are. Language holds no answer, not even a sure way of asking the question.)

When those lean near who offer an answer in cards, coins, patterns of stars, the shape shit steams on the earth, what wonder in man.

(Not enough wonder, I keep thinking. Deep roots in air, hard theories not answering why.

(Say God is not answering why. It's naming the question.

(What of all known, of history, of craft, of more than shadows?

(I don't know. I keep my mouth shut usually against how I want to scream against it all—

Rebecca.

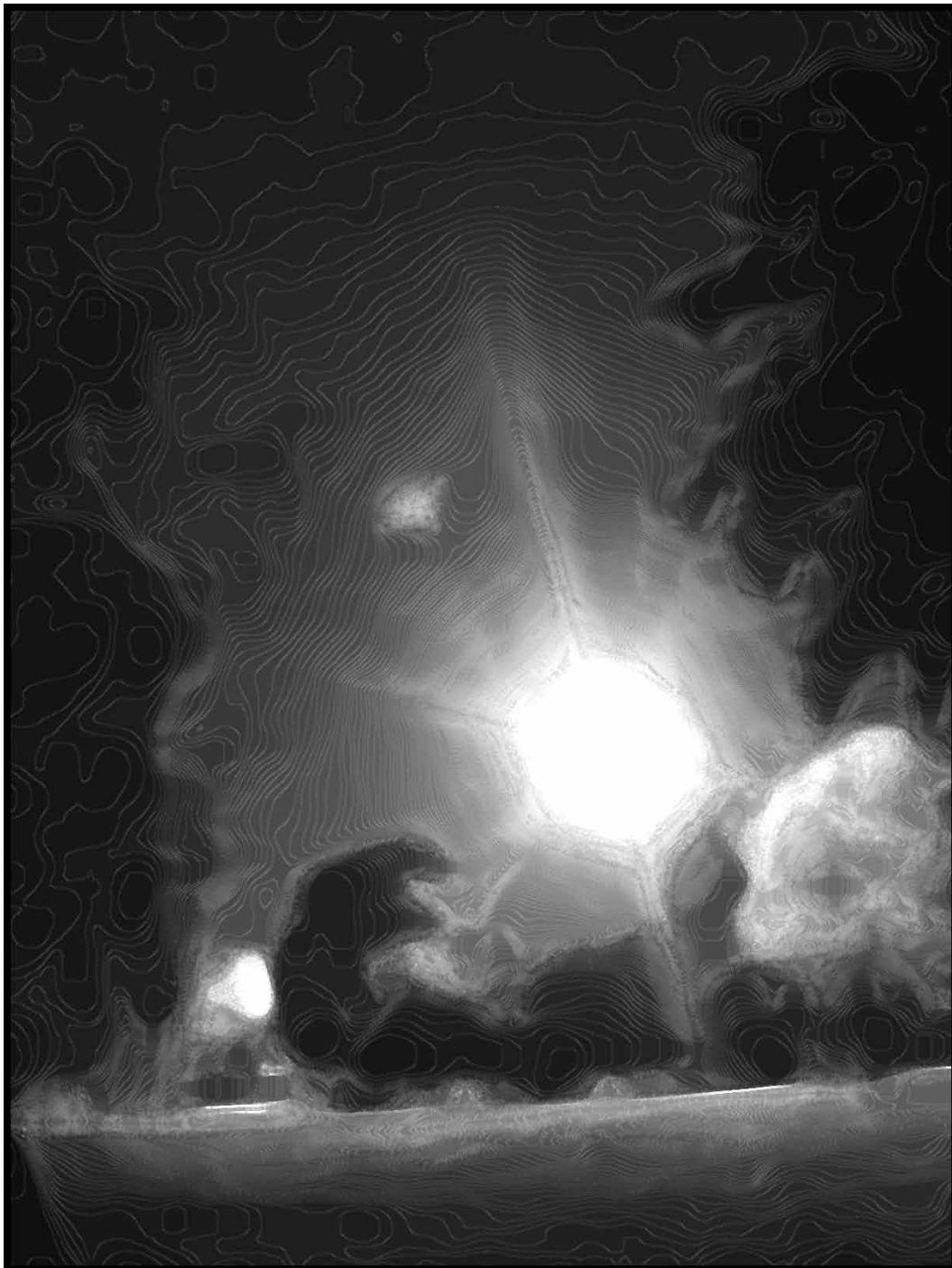
Raymond.

What then.

What then.

This book is a thousand pages long.

What then?



1001. 1002.

There are better & worse pages, Raymond. You know that.

What I don't know is why any of it.

It's what you do. What I do. What happens in these pages that matters—

Where have you been?

I could answer that in a lot of ways.

You could.

I was drawing.

What were you drawing.

You.

Me?

Yes. You were leaving.

Leaving. You?

No. Not really.

Leaving what? Who?

Where. You were leaving a where.

Where.

But you didn't know to where. It was scary. It hustled up close to your Art where you're dearest & you didn't like this.

No. I wouldn't.

So I gave you a hope.

A hope?

Yes. A hope. Like not all in departure is bad, or permanent.

I feel that way. A going & a lessening. A gap. A chasm. Something

Sadness?

Disappointment. Resentment. So many years. I really fucking believed. I tied everything close in my heart & work.

Now what.

Yes. Rebecca. Now what?

The next day. The next word.

Your drawing of me leaving but I had a hope.

Yah. But I can't tell you.

I've been writing this book for 3½ years, 1000 pages, & I would not know how to describe it to someone or my intentions.

Do you need to know? Maybe.

I don't know. Maybe.

Where's your dad?

He's around. You know that.

Why so much less?

It's OK, Raymond. Nothing goes away. Nothing returns.

When the faces cackle to many nights in drink, in waiting, in calling wisdom what tickles the skin—
When this is no solid ground, when not even music, old sure friend, then sleep, wage the remain in dream—

When the winds shift uncertainly, high, low, a change coming, a free choice riding on ways of inner compulsion, & pass between mountains again, between hills, through plains, over rivers, the single phrase that always find a sniffing nose if it sniffs long enough this world, “follow through, finally follow

through”

I think: maybe it simply stays now, maybe I have swallowed this dear thing so many times that it has come to stay & won't go, we're not apart, there is no need to renew, not now, there is now more need to look around, remember & keep moving, as Rebecca has said to me, remember & keep moving—

I keep this dear thing more by going elsewhere, I trust the good in it will go with me, it joins other things deep in my heart, remember & keep moving, remember & keep moving—

Other dear things more needed now, other needs are driving me, a need for home field, a home field I've not played on in a long time, return then but remember too, & keep moving—

Dear thing, I am bringing you with me, as I have done with other dear things, it is a trick but has the virtue of allowing a grieving soul to remember & keep moving

The anger, the loss, the grief—
Keep them, change by days &
years, they change too—nothing
gone—nothing returning—

xiii. / xxxiii. / lxxxviii.

Bobbie & the cop cannot find the Noah Hotel's elevator. It isn't at either end of the corridor they are in, nor in between, so the cop says let's use the stairs.

Bobbie isn't sure where they are going & asks.

He takes her hand as they push through the door to the stairway.

“You're with me now,” he says without looking back. His voice is gentle, firm, kind, sure, all at once, her body still tingles from his touch, from his release at her word.

Safety. That's what this was. A feeling of safety. And next time if he—

this was what it had felt like with the other one, that deep want, that male knowing she'd always greedied after—

he speaks suddenly & has to catch her she starts so badly from behind—holds her a moment—they move along—he begins again—

“We were both abandoned—we share this” he stops—she nods from behind him & yet he sees & continues—

“It was a gap in my mind—& I ended up here—with you—I'm not afraid of your youth or anything like that—I was afraid before because I thought you were the wrong one—”

“I'm not?”

“No. I wasn't paying for a hooker. I don't want you to think that. That's how it was covered up, what I wanted—”

“What?”

“I'm not him—the one on the beach—the one in the chat”

She does not fall again because he catches her up, carries her now—

“And you're not the answer to what I'm missing”

This is safety. This is protection. I don't know what this is.

“I began to look for something else not long ago. Or I think really I was looking all along & then I started finding finally—” he laughs, stops, catches her more securely in his arms—this stairway seems endlessly down—grey, cement, lit by a bulb every landing & half-landing—she doesn't want to arrive—

"I was at a library & there was a book & a man talking. Both. I found this book on the floor, sort of torn up, & I picked it up & sat down to read it. Thought I should. I don't believe in meaningful coincidences except that there's a gap in my life that keeps me unsure of *what the fuck I believe*—"

Sounds angry but, strangely, protects her more. This is safety. *Ohh safety.*

"So I started reading just as a man in a meeting room nearby starts talking to a group, & I read & I listen & something happens & then other things but it's like it had been night & suddenly someone burned a path before me & all I had to do was walk it—"

Silence. Her body calm, it's calm all over, how was this possible?

"He said 'there's no cage but perspective' & I read the line"—pauses, breathes—"this empathy we could brew like a tea, this breathing, this crack between hearts'—"

He stops. "The gap is the empathy. That's the good news. The gap is the cage of perspective. That's the bad."

"I was the cop sent under cover to rescue you. I found you. I am not returning you. We are going together. Neither of us is returning."

xiv. / xxxiv. / lxxxvii.

Dust, a violent hour, endurance. Crack between hearts, a silence, like a burial in breath—

"A story again?"

Mr. Bob the barman nods, smiles.

Tonight trembles sweetly to one touch, salts blindly another's eyes—

"Well, it was another time in some ways—"

"It always is. Somewhere there's three or four laughing in bed. Somewhere else a fist is making her unpretty for any other man—"

Violent hour, dust, endurance. Tonight reck the remaining bones of a belief, of a love, reck what green rides old cracks high—

"Thing is, my friend, I was done. My heart was empty. I looked at her in that hotel room. I mean the booze & pills were sitting there—"

What rises with the light, what crosses the moon, what sings shores empty of men tonight, a wish, a riddle, a truth—

"It wasn't her, it was me. Wasn't the booze, wasn't the cock pills. It was me. It was when she'd decided she'd come with me. I mean you don't fuck whores for love, right?"

Nod.

"She wasn't a whore. Exactly. I mean there was something else going on."

Someone asks for a drink. Mr. Bob glares, a rarity for him.

"In the dark it had been another time. She was now, I was then. Someone had engineered it."

"Then the lights went on."

"And I remembered."

"But—"

He shakes it off.

That was the hard thing to figure. Someone had brought him to that room. Someone knew about the night lifetimes ago.

"Some nights don't finish ever" he says, looking up at Mr. Bob suddenly.

Nods. Waits. Nothing else.

Those panties of hers were black lace & written on them were the words "*Bad Girls Need Love Too*" &

she lay back in that bed—this bed & she held out her arms—she was smiling shy—in my stupid young heart I couldn't figure out how an angel could be a bad girl—I looked at her—

“Someone knew about that night & brought me back there.”

And he came. He'd left that first time, left her without a word. Turned, walked the fuck out.

The room was dark & her voice was the same.

“Where did you go?”

For a long moment I say nothing. I breathe in impossibility. I breathe her in. Her voice. Her scent. I smell sex. I didn't then. She wants, wanted me to fuck her!

The room is too dark to see anything but shapes & outlines. She's there on the bed. Blankets, sheets pushed aside. I sniff again.

“Are you OK?”

Now I've seen shit. That's why I'm here. Someone is either paying me off or paying me back.

I sit on the edge of the bed.

“You still want to” she's tentative. I imagine the panties. The tits. I think of how many panties & tits since.

For a lingering moment I move in toward her, hear her grasp, smell her sex even stronger, move in & take her hands, instruct them on undressing me, make sure she touches down there, makes sure she knows I am possessing her every moment more & her lust & her innocence & her trust mingle together as I slip one hand into her panties she grasps didn't think I knew to do that, & that, *oh*—now move a little for me, *oh*—

For this lingering moment I let all the years in, the rough nights, the violent ones, the many alone, I let my single hand move her around & she moves, & moves, touch a nipple, pinch it, a little more, she starts to retreat, a touch confused, he's not learning too, he already knows, how—?

For the last of this lingering moment I am moving you into place under me & you are acquiescing half in shock as I pull your panties from you & make you help me gag you with them, I see your eyes in the darkness & before I can push in, hard & deep, the one you want & fear, I stop—

Silence. Stillness. “Take it out.”

Still darkness. “Who sent you?”

“I?”

“Nothing more is going to happen.”

“Why?”

Her question throws me.

“I'm sorry.” She's crying.

I stand, put on light.

“Oh.”

I noticed the pills on the table.

The booze. “Now the hard question was,” he says to Mr. Bob, “is were they there the last time?” He nods.

I expect her to flee. I'm not that boy. But she nods. I expect her to dress. She doesn't. Finally I stop expecting & look at her.

"Are you her?"

"Are you him?"

Check.

She makes no move to cover up & I can feel the tension shift that way. I push the blanket to her.

"No. Thanks."

Not sure what that means.

I guess it means I have to take her seriously in that way too.

We almost fucked. She's not seeing this as a trick now. I nod internally.

"OK."

"OK."

She's not the same girl, quite. But. Then again I'm, what, 30 years older?

So I move to dress now.

"Don't"

I try not to misunderstand. It's not a want for sex. It's more . . . she doesn't want me ready to go.

We sit quietly. She moves next to me. She leans into me.

"I want you to come back."

I say nothing.

"I'm going to wait here."

Mr. Bob nods. "She's waiting."

"Yah."

"Whoever she is."

"Whoever *I am*."

He stills me with his look & words. "Maybe she's not from your enemies or your friends."

"What mean?"

"Well, I'm not sure what I'm getting at here but maybe this is really between you & her. Nobody else."

I nod, not really knowing why.

"Go back. Now."

I nod. Again, not much why in it.

xv. / xxxv. / lxxxvi.

One night talking plainly to Preacher, in between this & the next, asking him about something with unknown meaning. Happened years ago.

"You said 'do the fucking work or shit nothing'."

He nods. I can tell he's not fully listening. I press. "I said, 'I'm not you, I don't know what the work is.'"

Nods again, still distracted. Resisting maybe.

"You said you'd never figured out if it was a collective work or if each person's was distinct. If it all fit together or not."

"I still don't know, if you're asking me now."

"No. I'm telling you."

"Telling me what?"

"You're my work."

He looks at me, turns away, looks at me again. Says nothing. Nods, then retracts it, don't ask me how. Has a preaching to do. I hand him his few notes. He looks at them, then shakes his head. Ah,

an ad lib. Roll it out live. I pull out my tape recorder. I did that sometimes.

Now years later, I listen.

You're still down there dancing as I hit the play button on the portable cassette player with the headphone jack & tinny-sounding speaker. These used to be popular, called Walkmens. Nearly everyone had one, like nearly everyone always has one of something. I moved under this tree to watch you, maybe touch myself if I got horny or bored or confused. He told me, your older self, to talk to you & instead I see this Walkman & examine its cassette tape & wow, more of you keep manifesting. I hit the play button.

"What rises with the light, crosses the moon, what sings shores empty of men tonight"—your voice half buried in hiss, in the coughs, the other sounds of a listening crowd moving around in their seats—your voice is beautiful—I listen as I watch you swing your flashlight around like a scimitar, down there at your wake or funeral or whatever it is—"Call it imaginal space."

Fuck. Yah. You wouldn't take credit for that idea or the phrase though I hadn't heard it before—was this the first time you talked about it? "One music, many musics, the porous ground to any staying cry of human truth"—it was a better time for us—this idea cheered you up—we had more gigs, more good times—

"Tonight reck the remaining bones of any belief, any love, any fire not fed by the hour"—there was a pause. Hissing. A cough. I see down below you are approaching the drummers around the big bonfire—"Reck what green rides old cracks high, what oncomes a torrent, violent hours"—& I say aloud with you: "Endurance. Dust." It's like the words were a magic & it really kicked in that night—"The dreams their caterwaul but who would listen?" You pause again. Hiss but no coughs, no sound of bodies doing. *Everyone was listening*—

"Call it imaginal space, the shifting crack between hearts, a wish, a riddle, a sooth. One music, many musics." I stand up, unsure, but stand, Tweety Bird with me, we're going down there, to you, listening still as you speak. "Asked what tool is this, say what needed?" Walking now, down there, to the drumming, to you—how the fuck does this work again?—Walking down there, to you, me, Tweety, our Walkman of your voice—drums louder,—“A salve, a meal, knowing the tongue of the galaxies themselves?” Walkman held high now, drummers louder, you are tentatively among them—wonder how this works? No sure way—there's a groove going on, fire, the full moon, dancers—"The challenge is to see tonight's glowing door by the morrow's plain light, see, & step through" & now I stop, halfway to you, was coming but no, now stopped, stopped.

I sit again. Watch you find the empty drums, take your turn, find your way in, realize there is no way in—no out & in—however you learn this—whichever words—I stay this far now—watching you—the cassette clicks off or I click it off—I don't know—I love you tonight unbearably down there & you do not know—you struggle tonight & I think you're aloft now—watch you disappear into the beat—

Imaginal Space. You don't know it tonight, not yet, & I'm on the far end.

Abh.

xvi. / xxxvi. / lxxxv.

Toward the morrow's plain light, the bursts of darkness along its hours, the finely strummed gestures rent by a fumbled faith in mystery—

A little movement. A breath.

A trip back into the junk of common truths. Common truths, able to brick up a wall or score a small rift of power.

What it sounds like within to surrender. A little. And more.

Common truths, bursts of darkness.

When the lace is shred, behold an easy wet cunt or a lightning to ride through?

Ahh. That again. Always that.

I feel her groping over me, my eyes closed, the scent, it's sweet, it's salty, & I don't know, eyes closed, her hands they start to, & then, & she tries, & she tries again, my own hands remain passive, I don't know who she is, who I am, for certain, her lips touch mine lightly then harder, oh here's something! She likes this, tries again, my eyes shut no, her lips are soft, are full, press sweetly & there is a moment but, no, there isn't, that wasn't, they press & she gains something, a little shift, well yes, she liked that, not like from expectation or instruction, no, she *liked* it, *she* liked it—

but wait—wait—what about me—she liked it, liked this, whatever name they called it, she liked it, felt it in more of her body—but did I like it? I mean with her? Did I? Was she doing it right? She really didn't know but—

xvii. / xxxvii. / lxxxiv.

Long exhaust. Long, long exhaust. I mine about me for those old still-working answers or a jury-rig of a few new ones. Either, or, both.

Do the fucking work. It's all I have to come back to over & over. *Do the fucking work.* It's my faith & it's not really enough but—yet—more like I'm not really enough but I push & I try & I am not really enough but—

Do the fucking work. Against the lies of so much, the stench, the disappointment, the failure of men to even near tending their own, or their world, I keep saying: *do the fucking work*—

she listens to my breathing, trying to know it—this is something here—her body tries to whelm her with fear, with flee—she doesn't—doesn't—his eyes are shut—his breaths—quick—her?—her touch? she thinks so but he won't look at her—ah, OK—but—she kisses me again—he is passive, breathes quickly, receives—think! no! don't think—

now his hand on her breast—holding, cupping—yes? no? squeezes his hand on her & shakes inside—

No. Yes. No. Now he squeezes. Oh. He did. Did he? She thinks so.

“Again. Please. I like it. I want it.” She thinks. She whispers. Oh. *Oh!* She tries to curl more into him, into his grasp, wants to be in his grasp, please (*fuck*) let me in your (*fuck*) grasp, he lets a little but still unsure & she (*don't think*) hesitates (*don't think!*) & reaches down there & touches it (*Oh!*) (*don't run!*) (*Oh!*) (*don't run!*) touches, again, feels it stiffen (*Oh!*) feels its tip, its length (*Oh!*) yes she is making it hard (*that's good*) (*that's good?*) for her & she tries to kiss again but it goes wrong (*why?*) (*it was soft, sweet*) (*now it's*) hard, goes wrong because (*it's hard*) it's not like before (*hard*) different (*hard*) & she is not how she was (*hard*) sort of more falling back (*hard*), not in grasp (*fucking hard*) more in possession, more (*hard*) what it was always like before (*hard*) coming at her & she had to flee (*hard*) or else (but) but not this time because she had wanted this (*hard*) (*no, soft, that kiss, soft*) (*hard*), somehow again (*hard*) (*please*) (*oh*) (*hard*) & yes she was, down there but (*please*) now? (*please*) (*hard*) (*please*) oh (*yes*) (*no*) yes no (*yes no*) hands on her there, & there (*yes no*) hands not passive (*yes no*) gripping, squeezing (*yes no*) (*hard*) hard, & she feels it (*hard*) hard as it pushes hard (*hard*) closer & nearer (*but it was soft, it was mine!*) & now, & oh, a word, a low spoken word (*hard*) (*because hard*) (*because soft & hard*) (*because soft is not enough*) (*oh please, oh*) feels it touching her closely (*oh hard*) presses squeezes scratches say it again, the word, say it

"say it!"

but no she didn't hear & won't know as he, & then he, *ohhh, no yes, please no yes, yes, no yesss, oh, I open out wider, I want to makes me want to makes me want to makes me open out o god wants to* (hard) *makes me* (hard) *oh god* (oh god) (wants to makes me) (hard) (o god) (the word is moan)

"moan for me" & she explodes.

"Christa"

A year, many later,

"Christa"

She sat with Oliver later, in Harvard Square, it was winter but a mild day

"Here, drink this"

He was a good listener & she never knew why she told him. She was tired of it, he was too. Talking wasn't much approved of, but they talked—talked instead of work

It had happened, here

"Sit up a little, let me adjust your pillow"

Oliver was wrong at first—

No I chased him. I couldn't help it.

I, um, drugged him, a little

He laughed. That's a new one on me.

It was just some X.

"Look at me, Christa. What's my name?"

He wouldn't touch me. I had to do this. You don't know why.

We all get horny.

No, it wasn't that.

What then.

"I'm Gretta. Come on! What's wrong"

He stopped.

Stopped.

Yes.

I thought you said.

No. Not him. He didn't. I didn't want him to.

Who?

Christa opens her eyes & looks at Gretta. Smile.

Preacher.

Preacher. He stopped.

"Are you OK."

Nod.

"What?"

Now he's here. In Cambridge.

Where?

I know he's here. And I have to decide.

Decide what? Does he want you back?

It's not that.

"Bowie knows Preacher."

Gretta starts. Christa never talks about Bowie, or uses his name.

"They were partners. Still are. I don't even know what that means."

It's me. I've been chasing him down. All these years. It's why we're here.
 Oliver looks stunned.
 I can do things, persuade people. That man I told you about, he was strong, he resisted me. But
 I had to get away from Preacher, from chasing him.
 It didn't work.
 No I made him fuck me till his cock hurt & my cunt was too sore.
 Oliver spasms. Christa has never talked like this.

"Is Preacher here?"
 "I'm not sure."
 "Why?"
 "Here isn't like everywhere else. Do you know him?"

We'll go to Seattle tonight.
 Our bus tickets are—
 We'll trade them in. I'll pay the penalty. We have to go. You have to come with me.
 I want out too, Christa.

"I should have known it. That they knew each other. He told me once that once something touches something else they are always perfectly connected, forever, no matter how far apart they are."

xviii. / xxxviii. / lxxxiii.

Penelope. Christina. I didn't know. I really didn't. Some nights I would sit with Benny & just ask.
 "One or the other?"
 "Or both?"
 "I'm trying to figure out if they started as two, & maybe switched?"
 "Or they are one but for your names?"
 "I don't know."
 I look at Benny. "I am dreaming."
 "Yes."
 "Right now."
 "Yes."
 "This is how we know each other."
 "Yes, Jack. You visit Dreamland. Sometimes we talk."
 "Are we enemies?"
 "No."
 "Rivals?"
 "In a way."
 "Because of her?"
 "Which?"
 "Her."
 "Yah, Jack. Her."
 "So what do I do?"
 "Are you asking for my help?"
 "Yes."
 "With her?"
 "Yes."

"She's here."

"Now."

"Yes, Jack. Always."

"Since when."

"Since she was small, Jack."

"Which one?"

"Yes."

"Maya?"

"Yes."

"Ahh."

"Do you want to see her?"

"Yes. No."

Benny laughs. "I can make that happen here if you let me."

"No. Wait."

We look at each other. Benny is fairly consistently baldheaded, tattooed, a sort of badass looking dude. Not sure why but that's how he looks to me. Like someone I would rather have on my side of a bar fight, or any other kind of fight.

"Thanks, Jack."

"Do you want her?"

"Who?"

"Her."

"Not like you do."

I walk into a classroom & she is in the front row. Oh. This. I hear Benny laughing in my ears. "See if you can play this one out a different way, mate."

She's in the front row. There's a boy too. I feel that between them as I enter, it dissipates as she turns to me, as he doesn't.

One glance & no more. This is not the first class, I can tell by the braid in her hair, how her skirt is short but swishy & pink tights.

"But he's there too. What of him?"

I look at him, for a moment as though forever. For that, all of it, he & me.

"You won't ever have her."

"You can't say that."

"You won't come even close."

"Why. But."

"She came here to listen. But you don't have anything to say yet."

"No. But."

"You feel it in your thighs for her."

" "

"Hard & deep."

" "

"Say yes."

"Yes."

"Feel it big in you & want to fill it big in her."

"Yes."

"Look away."

"I can't."

"Look away."

"No. No!"

"Do you see my hand."

"Yes."

"What's it doing."

"Touching her cheek."

"Yes."

"I wish."

"Not now."

"Not ever?"

"Watch."

"Her cheek. Her neck. Her shoulder. How?"

"That's the mystery. I am always there with her. Touching like that, always close."

"But. Yes."

"There is an open space. Not taking or giving clearly."

"Sharing?"

"Music."

"Music?"

"There are six questions I want you to write down & think about."

I pause. She waits. Everyone waits. Everyone else waits for the questions. She waits for me.

"That's the difference. Do you understand?"

"What can't I."

"You can't. Not her."

"Why electrify an animal with consciousness?" They write. I lick along her neck.

"Why point his eyes toward the stars as he shits?" They write. I bite her inner thigh twice.

"Why make fucking the stuff of grunt & prayer?" I breathe along her shoulders, her nipples. Breathe. Breathe harder. *Breathe harder.*

"Why let him speak knowing in lies & truths?" she lurches away, suddenly, softly.

"Why the rift from nature, urge to know, consume?" She leans forward, back. Not apart, not union.

"Why the dread path to demise with dreams of escape?" She's back in her seat, waiting me. Has written the questions, like the rest.

"Now what" asks Benny.

"I don't know."

"She's waiting."

"Yah."

"Well."

"Yes?"

"Maya?"

"Yes, Jack. It didn't start with you. Not even close."

"And it doesn't end."

“Why should it? She’s better at it now than she used to be.”

“Better?”

“Accepting. Working with what she has, what she is.”

“

“It’s OK, Jack.” Benny laughs.

“Not this way.”

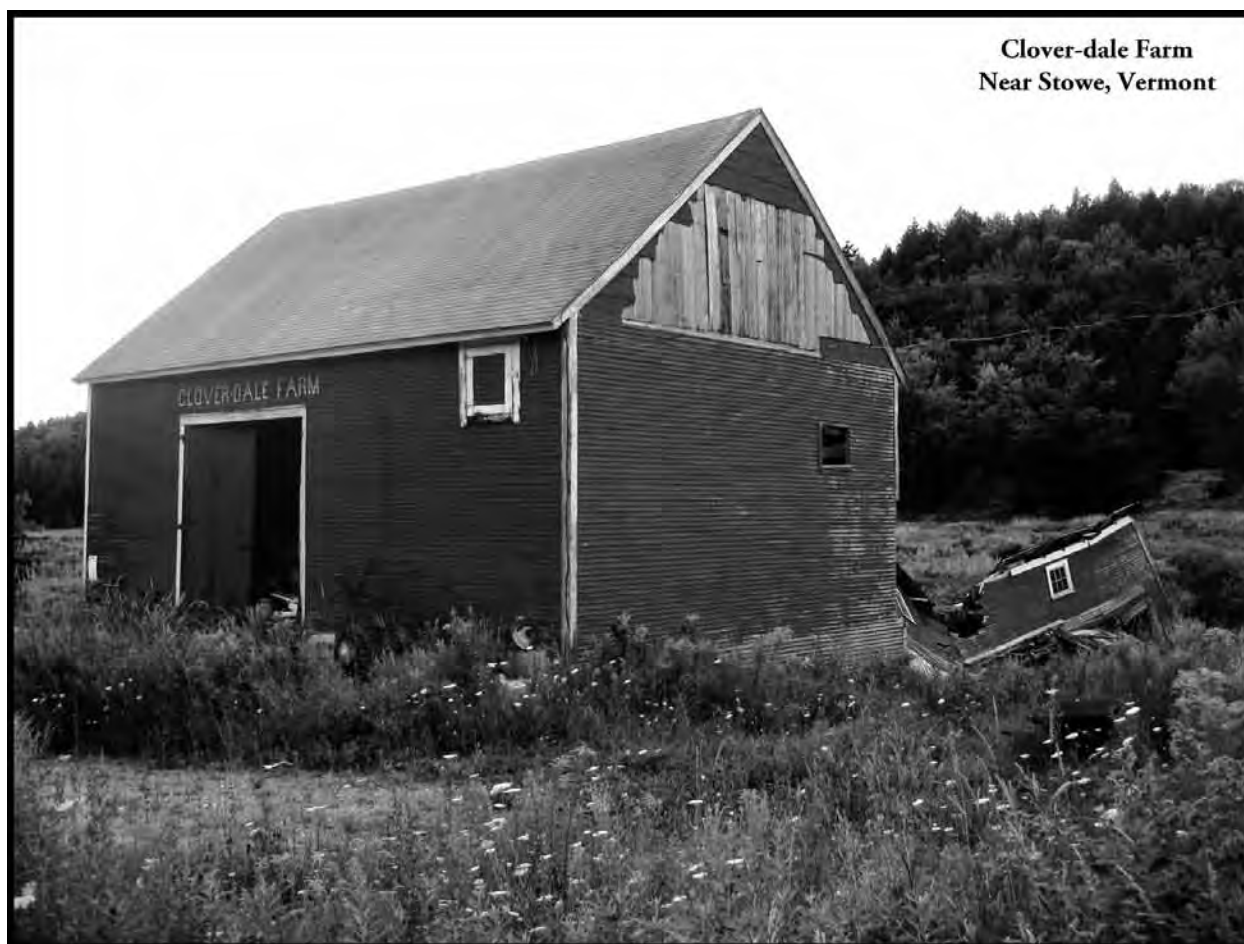
“How then?”



To be continued in Cenacle | 80 | December 2011

* * * * *











Tom Sheehan


Death of a Metaphor

I fished with Charlie, long from Europe's great noise
and his bomber pilot's cushy seat high on top of France.
But footed here, on banks of our child-favored lake,
September's sun zoomed down like a fire was fled.

We had bagged a dozen bottled beers, cautiously aligned
in shallow water, until pickerel flotilla poked upon the sack.
When sunray, sediment and time settled, his eyes transfixed;
he was knowing what I did not know, the living imagery

of shadowed things, pointing, holed up in horizon's world
of silence, war-stilled submarines at targets below in Brest,
Lorient, Saint Nazaire in '41, LaRochelle, Bordeaux in '42,
Perhaps Toulon in '43. Dreamt swift torpedoes, oh dared loose.

Sun's redness shivered under breeze. A flag flew. A bugle blew.
Pickerel force darted away, repaired, re-commissioned, ordered
to sea to loose Hell, extend true silence on Earth's watery face.
The quiet out there, the final quiet after war, flipped around us.

The pickerel fled, swift as a bottle cap snapped off by hand.
I thought of pal Parkie's tank turret popped open to Sahara's
rush of hot air inscribing his lungs, Egypt's bitch light in his eyes.
When sun shivered our red-faced lake, Charlie's dark images died;

the slim, hungry forms, mortal at last, slipped under Atlantica
as we bid adieu to our unforgotten wars and a dozen bottled beers.

* * *



The Barn at Rapid Tucker's Pond

Some barns know how to kneel;
this one does, looking over shoulder,
sighing, whispering, I'm never sure
which in these bird-gray mornings.

They tolerate much: host armies
of creeping squadrons, dragooned
columns gnawing away time, flighty
creatures busy as town Saturdays,

ceding fathoms to dark hungers.
The warp and twist of checked timbers
silent as skulls, heady lintels
and cross braces at straddled chest

being crushed, sills aching to cry,
all stand their serious doubts.
They cling at selves, members
of the immediate family

waiting for a wake to happen,
or a song of reprieve at dusk,
heaving into morning's mirror
another night of survival.

It is why I love this old barn,
one like the others, falling down
slowly, taking pulse at oak wrist,
find its own bright heart of tree

cored hard in gallant crosspiece, joist,
perhaps in hoof-thinned grasping plank,
or, in ever-summer loft, dreams
cached away for awakenings,

odors barns have a right to keep.
Here, at pond-side, I look over
shoulder at a barn looking too,
back at slow, labored beginning,

feel crosscut vibrate, axes shiver
at edging, two men's breath rising
in a column as if one lung works,
ritual of a barn-raising, cutting at air.

* * *

Night Forgery

Just before dawn
a shadow makes tracks
in the dew-lit grass.

Later, a whisper
and a scent follow
the forsaken imprints.

Not a leaf stirs,
but if I watch closely,
blades of grass ease upright,

a loam granule
is released to airs
staggering under stars,

and the whisper, vague,
is familiar, perhaps stripped
from gists of old conversations.

Years ago,
at a Red Sox game, I
became separated from my father.

All the goblins
of young creation hung over
my hysteria, poked at my terror.

When he found me,
pawed, frayed, diminished,
he said he'd never leave me again.

This soft forging
in the night grass
is a kept word, a vow.

* * *

Leg Surgery

When a surgeon sawed my father's leg off,
he handed it to my nurse wife;
a hard touch repeating
when she nestles me.

She put his leg into a bag
in a hospital basket. It fell with a thud.
Now and then, I know, she collects that
sound again when a door closes in the night.

* * * * *

WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES FROM THE PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION

Music. Poetry. Rant. Mindfood.

turn on . . .

tune in . . .



High-speed: <http://spiritplants.org:9000>
Saturdays 11 am-2 pm Eastern US time
On the Web: <http://radio.spiritplants.org>

Mark Christensen


Excerpt from
Acid Christ:
Ken Kesey, LSD, & the Politics of Ecstasy
 [Essay]

Published by Schaffner Press. Copyright 2009 and 2010, Mark Christensen

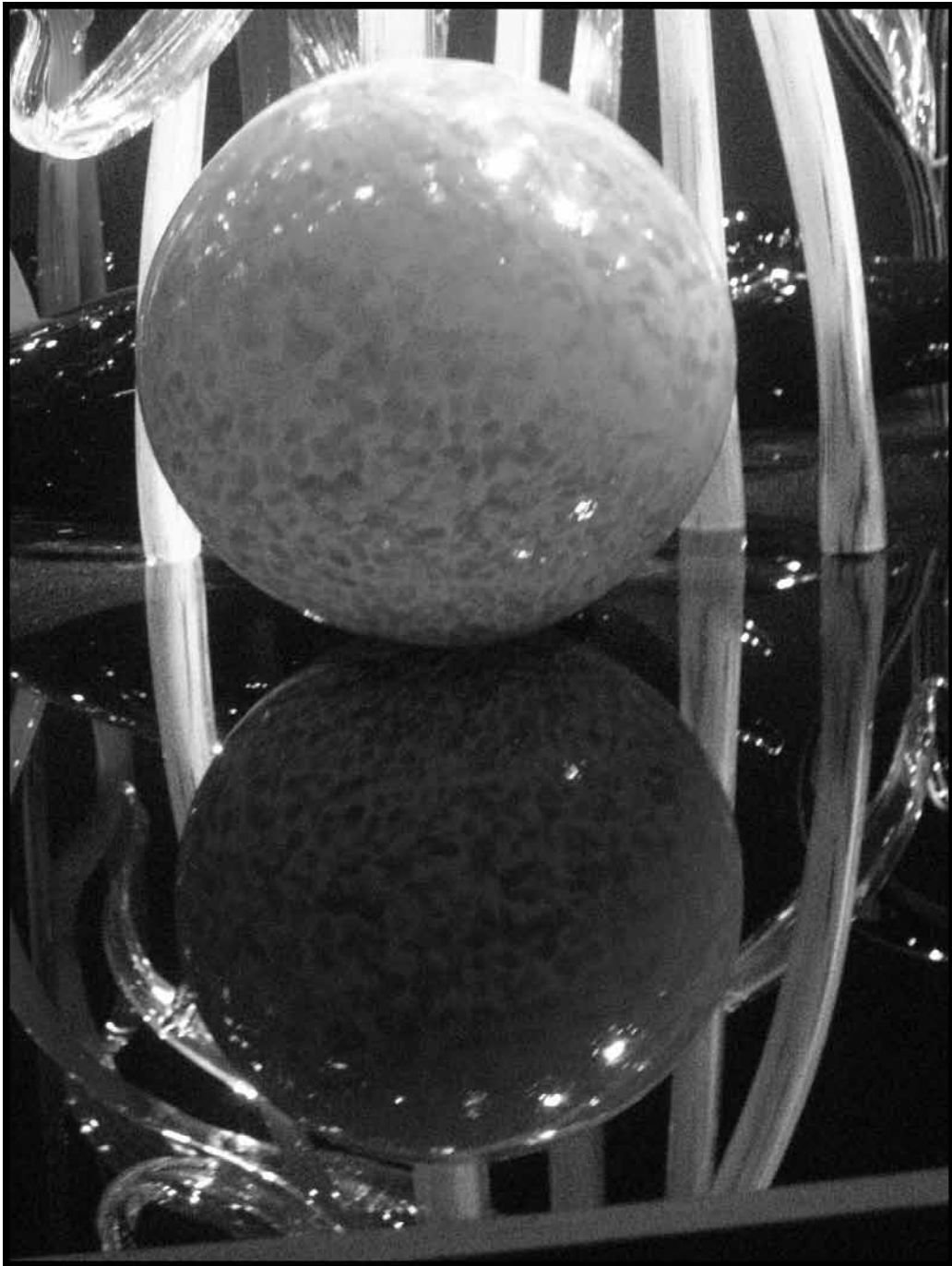
A Christ figure who quit his day job as the new Norman Mailer to deliver millennial baby boomers the psychedelic New Jerusalem, Ken Kesey's super hero career began with the biggest bang ever. Not even Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer, or John Updike had, by age 28, enjoyed the double-whammy of two literary and commercial smash hit novels—only then to ditch literature to rescue mankind, hoping to “stop the coming end of the world.”

“The Chief” was an archetypal American Fair-haired Boy (sub-species Son of the West) madman for all seasons, as profoundly American as John Wayne, Hugh Hefner, Sonny Barger, or Britney Spears. Writer, artist (Kesey's illustrated jailhouse journal reveals a master of caricature), Olympic class (almost) athlete, musician (his frog-voiced “Jimmy Crack Corn” ranks with, if not “White Rabbit,” at least “Double Shot of My Baby's Love”), lady's man, magician, thespian, friend to those who had no friends, social architect, jail bird, original hippie cum great white father, the Great Truth Teller as consummate bullshit artist, he was that rare soul who had a talent for everything.

And as representative of an all-American ideal, the dream of unlimited success and total lack of restraint, Kesey remains hard to beat, and through his “freak freely” ministry great ideas flew from his head like illuminated dandruff. A writer who declared the novel was yesterday's paper, and abandoned literature to create “the Art of I,” starring himself as Pied Piper on the Seeker's New Path, he was an actor looking beyond the footlights to his base: the flower-haired seekers in the cheap seats. In a stunning new take on the old Hollywood saw, “But what I really want to do is direct,” Kesey abandoned “archaic” prose to spend nearly every dollar he'd earned from his best-selling, culture-changing novels *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* by shooting thirty reels of 16 millimeter film, recording the bohemian pranking of pure, government-inspected Sandoz LSD-25-acid-blasted ex-college kids.

His famously unfinished capital M Movie was an epic tale of levitating hipsters on the road—the Kesey-invented Merry Pranksters, proto-hippies/neo-beats who, in tattered preppie dress, recalled body doubles of a Kingston Trio album cover. The Movie—which documented Kesey's soon-to-be-famous 1964 bus trip, and which served as a sort of New Testament of this LSD ministry (a trip that would have likely been a lot less “famous” if not chronicled by Tom Wolfe in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*)—could have been a smash.

Doubt it? Witness the early documentary sensation, *Endless Summer: In Search of the Perfect Wave*, filmed by Bruce Brown at about the same time, that reflected similar utopian



themes (substitute surfing for acid). Had Kesey and his band of Stanford grads possessed the ability to match the recorded sound to the recorded film they shot (the single technical glitch that tunneled the Movie), Kesey might have become a sort of 21st century psychedelic Socrates.

Yet, courtesy of Wolfe's book, Kesey became nevertheless a walking, talking, heaven-hawking, Technicolor catalyst who jumped from the page to change our culture. In Kesey's wake, Paul Krassner, Tim Leary, Tom Wolfe, and Hunter Thompson became the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John of the Love Generation (with Charlie Manson later on taking a star turn as Satan Lite), whose sudden, huge young audience waited with baited breath for them to write the new social and psychedelic testament.

Kesey's Kesey trumped Mailer's Aquarius. For one thing, Ken had that posse. The Pranksters became Kesey's beloved Beta house fraternity on wheels. The fraternity became the tribe—if not the Apostles. A Boho Robin Hood—whose clubby sensibilities were expressed by his watch words: "You're either on the bus or off the bus"—, Kesey resembled a leader of a political party who platform was *party, party, party*. He lived to get higher than high, take his mind to karmic Everest. Why? Perhaps, as Sir Edmund Hillary said: because it was there.

In the pre-metrosexual, pre-Masters of the Universe universe, farm-bred wrestler/magician (he was able, among many other fitting illusions, to make his wedding band levitate weightless above his dining room table) Kesey—shepherd to a Woodstock Nation of sheep—became an American icon almost equal, at least briefly, to the Marlboro Man. A master of product placement, a commercial for a more ethereal leaf.

A metaphysical monster of the midway, a man of near limitless abilities and startling limitations, Kesey was Pied Piper for a generation for whom the willing suspension of disbelief was key to the Holy Grail. Golden Boy writ writer, "wildly gregarious," Kesey, with the build, as Cowley said, "of a plunging fullback" and the hail-fellow-well-met *bonhomie* of a literary Mad Man Muntz, posed an appropriate and puzzling Messiah for a generation that went from saving the world to selling it—from bongos to BMWs—in far less time than it took to go from "All You Need is Love" to "Cheeseburger in Paradise."

Kesey was, among many other things, big on symbols, one of the first to take the American flag off its staff and really fuck with it. The new edicts and gospels and megalomaniacs were born not to stone tablets and mountaintops but TV screens and electric guitars. The acid prophets Kesey and Leary preached not commandments as much as permission—the promise of Aquarius Now delivered by forces powerful, wise, and, above all, unseen.

"I never knew anyone in my life," novelist Robert Stone marveled, "before or since, who was a dreamer on that scale, who really believed in Possibility, the great American bugbear Possibility, to the degree that Kesey did. I never knew anyone who had his ability to communicate that sense of possibility."

While first painted as a radical, the collective portrait of Kesey amounts to pastel idolatry. Though he dedicated a good part of his life to drugs, romanticized their use with terrible effectiveness, and ultimately died because of them, in most popular portraits of Kesey he appears as a gentle giant, at worst the high priest of a failed religion.

Many details of Kesey's past have been lost to legend or convenience.

And too, his books are often oddly misremembered. *Cuckoo*, whose surreal narrative is often credited as psychedelia's first great gift to art, has also been dubbed the primer for 1960s anti-authoritarianism, though its hero, roustabout R.P. McMurphy, is about as prototypically hippie-like as John McCain. *Sometimes a Great Notion* is similarly credited as a totem to free-

thinking individualism, though its protagonists are as locked in their “never give an inch” beliefs as the Christian fundamentalists Ken Kesey himself often seemed to mirror.

So why did Kesey’s life seem to go so far downhill after those two novels?

It was certainly not for want of energy or ambition. No tendril-armed bifocalist laboring in a cobwebbed garret, burly Kesey was the big man on campus writ artiste, acidhead alpha dog, and action figure, an aging high school jock in flower power drag. And he was not particularly a free thinker, taking his cues not from proto-hippies Rousseau, Heathcliff, or Walt Whitman, but from his childhood comic book heroes Superman, Spiderman, Plasticman, Batman, and Captain Marvel. But, fly as they might, comic book superheroes aren’t free spirits. They are cops.

Kesey’s novels were often populated by errant hollering Paul Bunyan manques from a wild west Oregon that most buttoned-down Oregonians barely knew existed: a dystopic realm in which brilliant rural rubes, “bull goose loony” Ayn Rand types in cork boots, ruled a feral mythological roost. But cosmopolitan myth-master and university town homeboy Kesey, who owed as much to Joseph Campbell as he did to William Faulkner, was no Noble Savage. Nor—as a prophet and Great Truth teller rabble rouser—was Kesey a tub-thumping Commie Madonna kneeling at the altar of Karl Marx or Mother Bloor.

A man of many contradictions, Kesey was a walking-talking proof that belief as well as beauty could be in the eye of the beholder. People tended to believe in Kesey as whatever they wanted to believe. The Republic’s favorite hallucinogenic, generous, and lackadaisically self-centered Houdini of hip, Kesey could write prose as tight or preposterous as the New Testament; yet he also banged out typed-by-the-yard speed rants you could edit with a blow torch. Kesey’s ideas for an interactive “video democracy” were decades before their time. Sadly, though he had a transformative vision that went beyond hippie socialism, as a tribal genius but a corporate naïf, he was unable to implement it beyond his Oregon statewide “Bend in the River.” As a manifestation of perhaps the greatest idea he ever had—a radical new “people’s democracy” created by shifting political power away from politicians to statewide referendums whose merits and shortcomings would be broadcast and debated on television and then voted on by ballots published in statewide newspapers—“Bend in the River” was truly revolutionary. What had gone wrong?

When Kesey returned from Egypt in 1975, he took his two poet pals Walt Curtis and Marty Christensen for a long ride from Portland to his farm outside Pleasant Hill in his big long convertible. Along for the ride were Marty’s wife Lorna and a circulating bottle of whiskey. On the way, Ken addressed big issues: “I went to Egypt with Krassner and we debated the Venusians versus the CIA.”

From the back seat, Marty said, “Uh-huh” and Kesey continued, “Now he (Krassner) believes the CIA-military-industrial complex has a conspiracy—and I believe it’s the Venusians.”

Marty said, “Do you think the CIA is not that smart?” and Kesey replied, “I think the CIA is not that smart. I don’t think they can put it together.”

It was left to Marty, who was by then perhaps a little gassed, to do the job. “I think the common man is probably on your side. You know, it’s ironic that over fifty percent of the American people believe in flying saucers. But I doubt ten percent of them believe the CIA is in control. But all of the rational evidence points out to me”—Marty suddenly spoke in headlines—“THAT THEY PROBABLY ARE.”

As an irradiated gold standard of bohemia—an isotope whose hand was sure on the joy stick during key flights to the stratosphere—Kesey had here behind his balding fleecy head a laminated dollop of a man with whom he could confide. “I feel that the Venusians are real. And they are the bad guys. But—that people with more power than we have, have those forces covered. I felt like, after being there in Egypt and talking to certain people, that those guys—those arcane forces—have those otherworldly villains under their thumb.”

Long before being resurrected as a progressive savior from a metaphysical time gone by, Kesey had, like Ernest Hemingway before him, promoted himself from literature to fame. Hemingway had hot-rodded nihilism, understatement, “life style,” and celebrity to achieve, with his safari suit iconography, brand name recognition. By the 1950s, Hemingway was as recognizable as a stop sign. Writer promoted to product. But unlike that legendary literary lion, Kesey saw a much larger life than Letters. For like his sometime mentor Tim Leary, Kesey understood what America wanted in 1965 was a magic sacrament to enfranchise a new religion—acid had told him so, and all you had to do was take one look around the psychedelic Neverland that was Kesey’s Stanford digs at Perry Lane to see that young America was ready for a new divinity. A religion not of God, but of the self. An “acid Christian” crucified as under-achieving psychedelic superman—Kesey liked to recite:

*Of offering more than what I can deliver,
I have a bad habit, it's true.
But I have to offer more than what I can deliver,
To be able to deliver what I do.*

Which would be, of course, the Holy Grail.

A job that—if not God—at least fate had created for him. Hippie he-man Kesey waxed poetic like a prophet from a nihilistic Bible Belt, a perfect poster boy for flower-powered liberation and godless heavenly ideals. Opinions vary. “I have great love and affection for Ken Kesey,” Tim Leary said. “I have a deep sense of brotherhood and companionship for Ken Kesey. I have seen him as very Protestant and quite moralistic, and quite American in a puritanical way. And basically untrustworthy, since he is always going to end up with a Bible in his hand.”

Fitting perhaps for a man who got shit on his shoes milking cows, and was a friend of rural remedies. “I’ve used cornstarch on my balls for years,” Kesey told Krassner. “Y’know how it is when you’re swarthy anyway and maybe nervous like on a long freeway drive, or say you’re in court when you can’t unzip to air things out, and your clammy old nuts stick to your legs? Well, a little handful of plain old cornstarch in the morning will keep things dry and sliding the whole day long. Works better than talcum and don’t smell like a nursery.”

A wearer of the coat of many colors, like no writer, hippie, or messiah I’d ever heard

about—who nevertheless wrote almost frighteningly well—or just wrote, Kesey was a man so eclectic in ideas, passions, insights, and blunders as to suggest a Ginsu knife of psyches, and whose aforementioned watchwords of liberation—“You’re either on the bus or off the bus”—were actually Kesey-speak for “My way or the highway.” Was that because of, or despite, LSD?

* * * * *



Scriptor Press

Independent Publishing Since 1995



Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA. Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*, the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler* of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the Jellicle Literary Guild.

Visit us online at ScriptorPress.com
for more information.

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in the pages of *The Cenacle*. He and his partner Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor host the delightful monthly Out Loud Open Mic (<http://www.outloudopenmike.com>) in Melrose, Massachusetts. Ric's poetry alone raises higher the level of work shared at this event.

Charlie Beyer lives in Belize. The first section of his journal appeared in *The Cenacle* | 78 | June 2011. This issue's section is so harrowing, it should stand as a stark warning for all world travelers. More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com/>.

Mark Christensen lives in Laguna Beach, California. It was Ric Amante who loaned me Christensen's *Acid Christ*. It is a deep, wild, & movingly personal account of lives & times in the '60s. More information can be found at <http://www.acidchrist.com/>.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1803 and died in Concord in 1882. His essay in this issue was previously re-published in the Burning Man Books series in 2000. For those who have an interest in what 19th-century American hippie-philosophers were like, Emerson's books are a good place to start.

Paul Finch lives in Leeds, England. He is a new contributor to *The Cenacle*. He also is known as DJ Frogs online, doing the crazy-good show "In the Window" on SpiritPlants Radio. More of his work & words can be found at <http://madasaboxof.blogspot.com/>.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>. She is teaching now more than ever, she says, but her fine poetry is coming at the same clip, if not more quickly.

Jeremy Kiler lives in Oak Ridge, New Jersey. His artwork last appeared in *Cenacle* | 72 | April 2010. This issue his picture is from the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations (<http://occupywallst.org>). More of his work can be found at <http://catfishrivers.com>.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her website is <http://rollwiththechanges.org>. Her poetry also features via delightful video at Jellicle Literary Guild meetings.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. We see each other at Ric's Out Loud Mic meetings, and it often seems to me that he has seen every major poet around read live. Not as well known, but himself just as major.

Walter Smith is a crazy hermit who lives and roams the hills of Rainbow Valley, Arizona. He is rumored to be an insane cult leader, and should be avoided at all costs. He is unarmed. This is his first contribution to *The Cenacle*.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. More nights spent up late working on new issue of *The Cenacle*. She is golden delicious, like the best of apples.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. Employed, befriended, reasonably healthy, safe. Thinking of all those in the world who aren't.

* * * * *



"Take away the right to say fuck and
you take away the right to say fuck the government."
--Lenny Bruce



